Until Death do us Part

11

Story: Hiroshi Takashige

Art: DOUBLE-S

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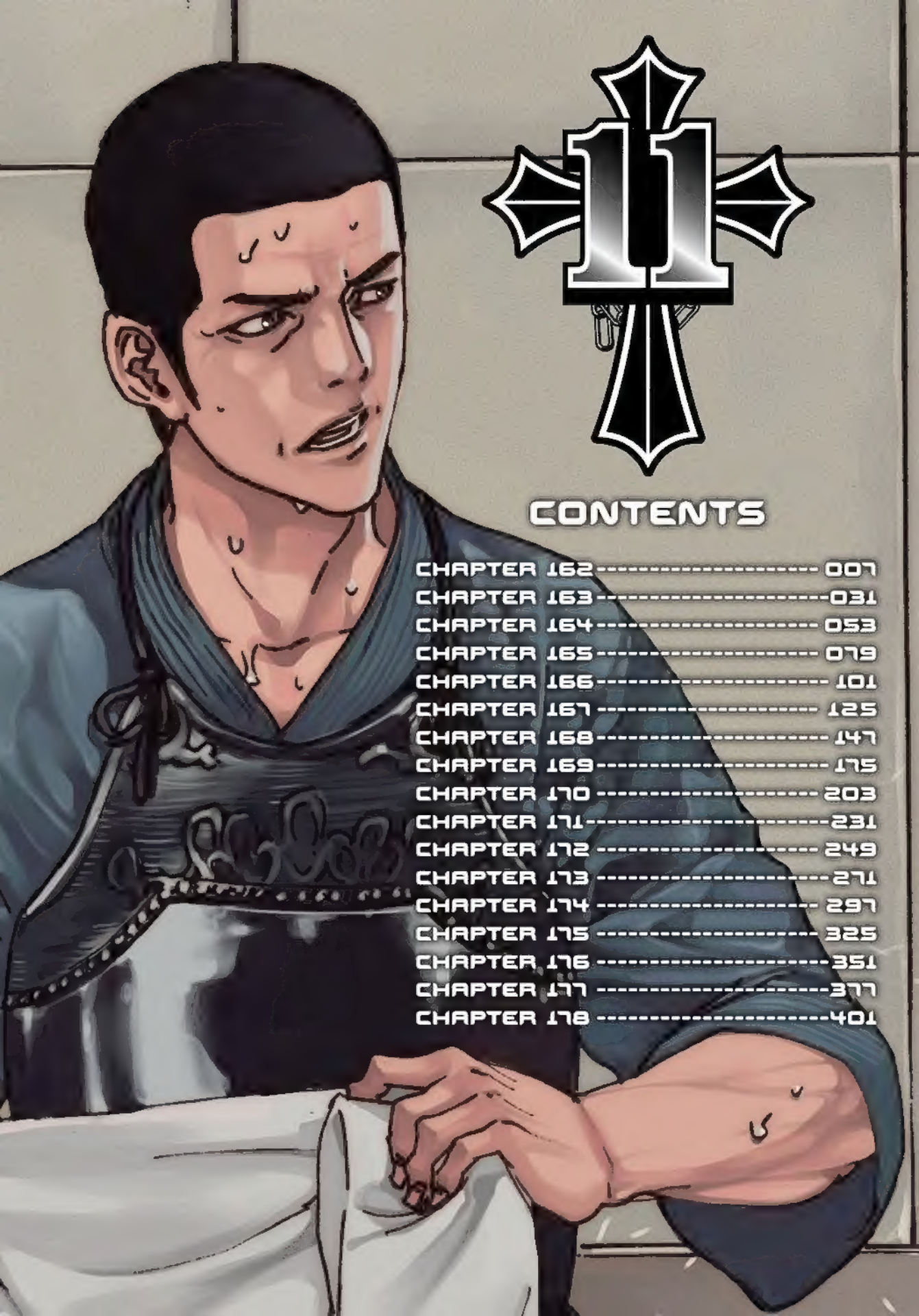

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ONE OF THE KEYS TO MASTERING AN ULTIMATE SWORD SWING IS THE SPEED OF THE BLADE.

THE SWORD IS SPEED!

THIS WILL SETTLE IT!!!

chapter 162

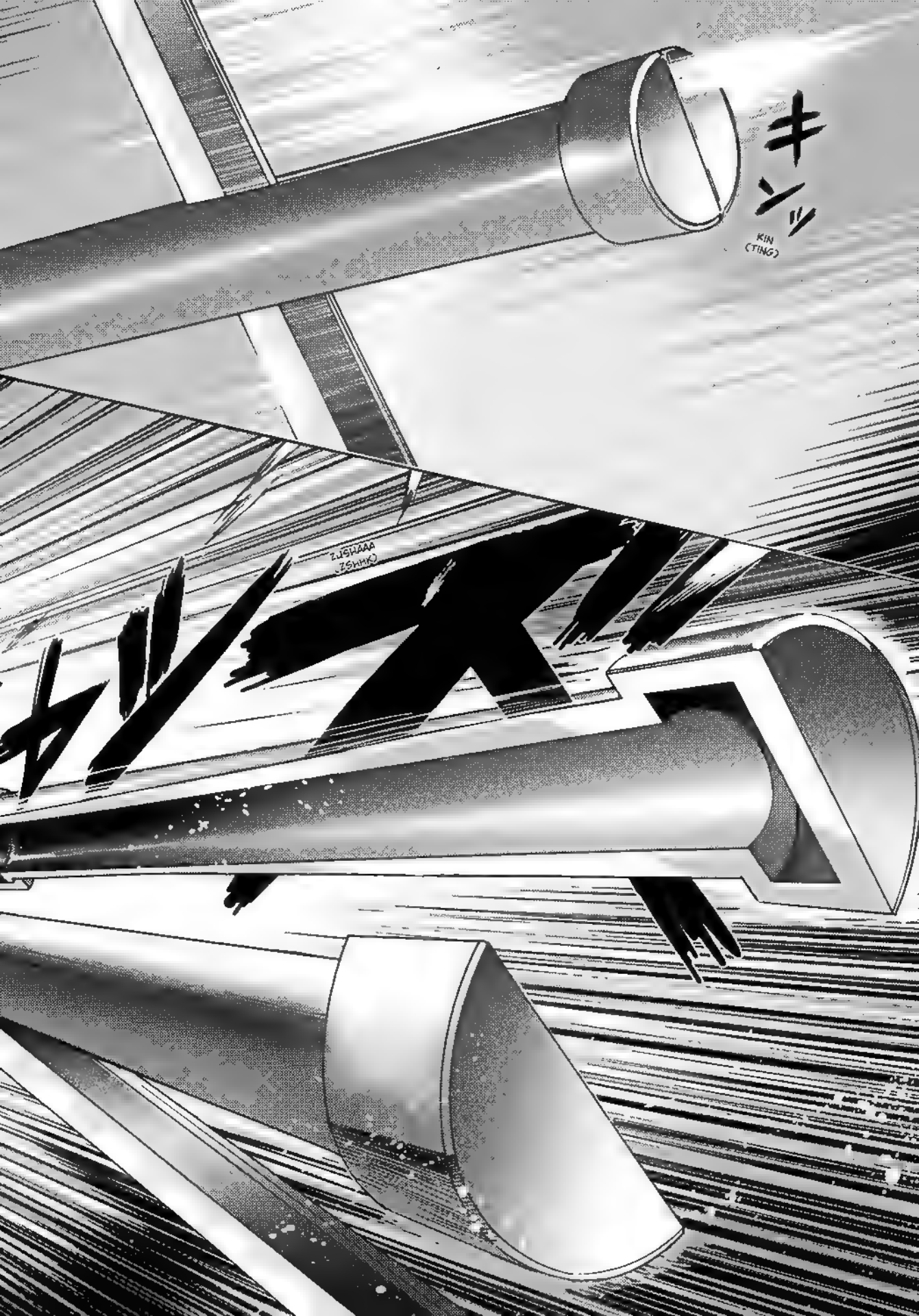
THE SWORD IS SPEED!
THIS WILL SETTLE IT!!!

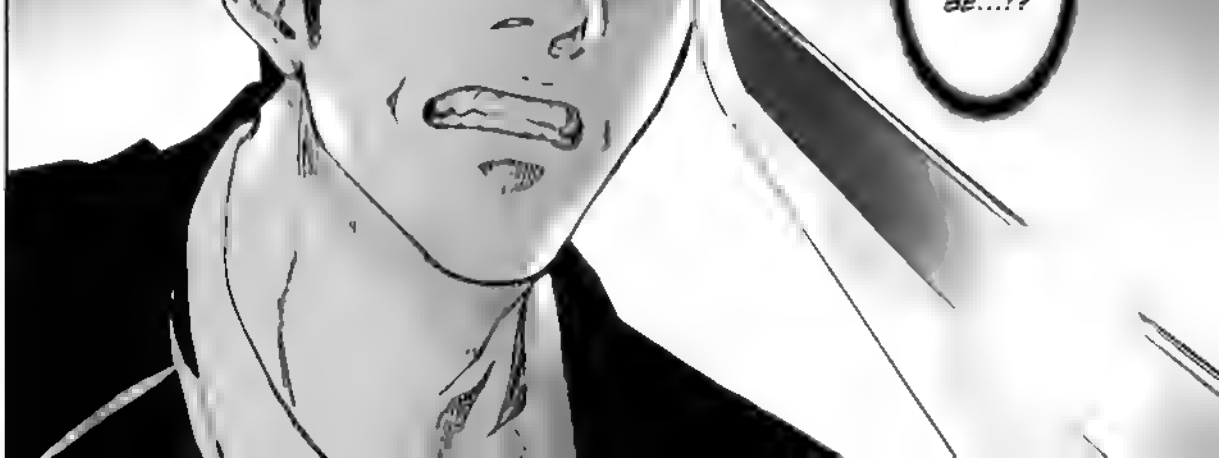
chapter 162

キン

KIN
(TING)

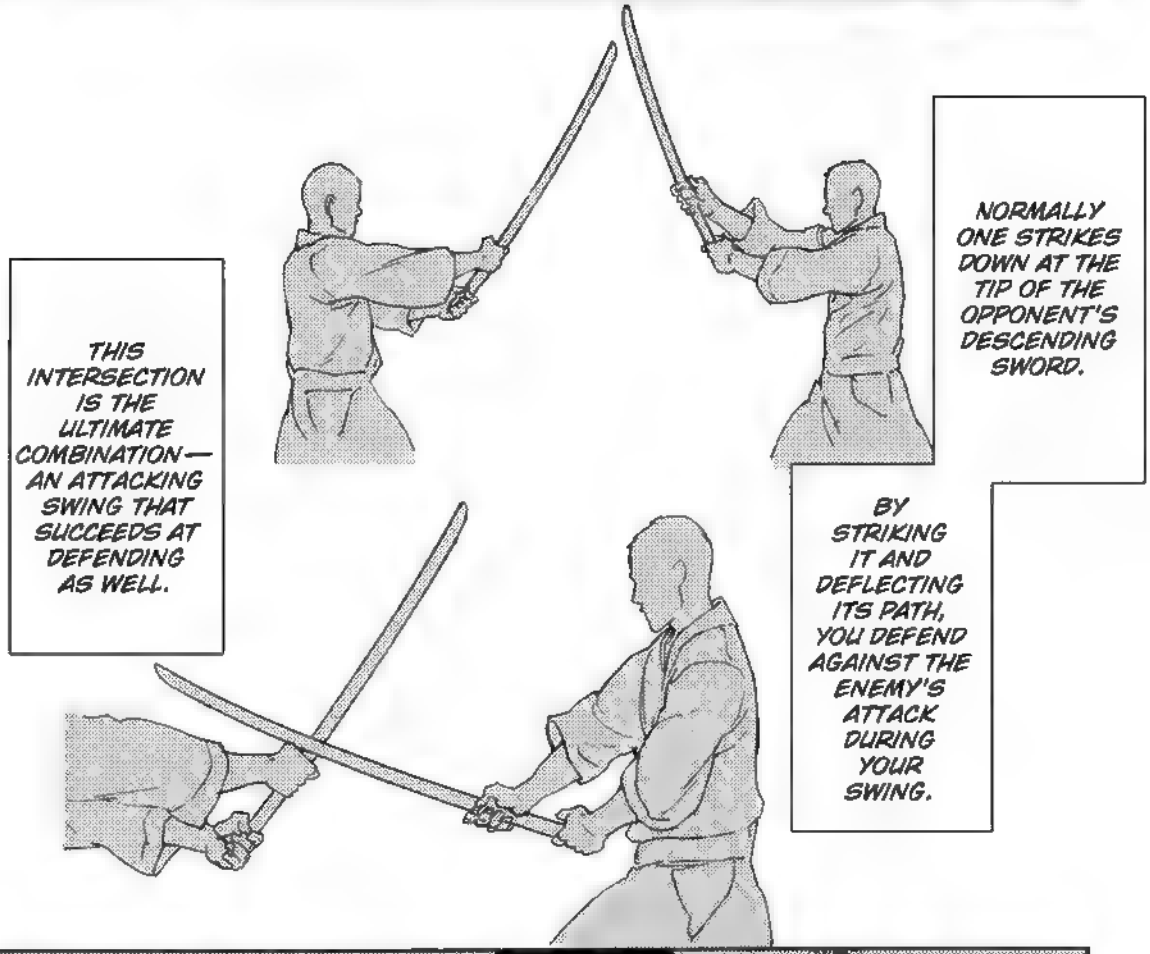
ZUSHAAA
SHHH


キン
KIN (TING)
ZUSHAAA (SWISH)


HOW CAN THIS BE...!?

スッ
SUU (SHH)
I'VE LOST...
KACHI (CLICK)
...
THAT WAS SIMPLY THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN KATANA AND POLICE BATON.
NO, YOU HAVEN'T.

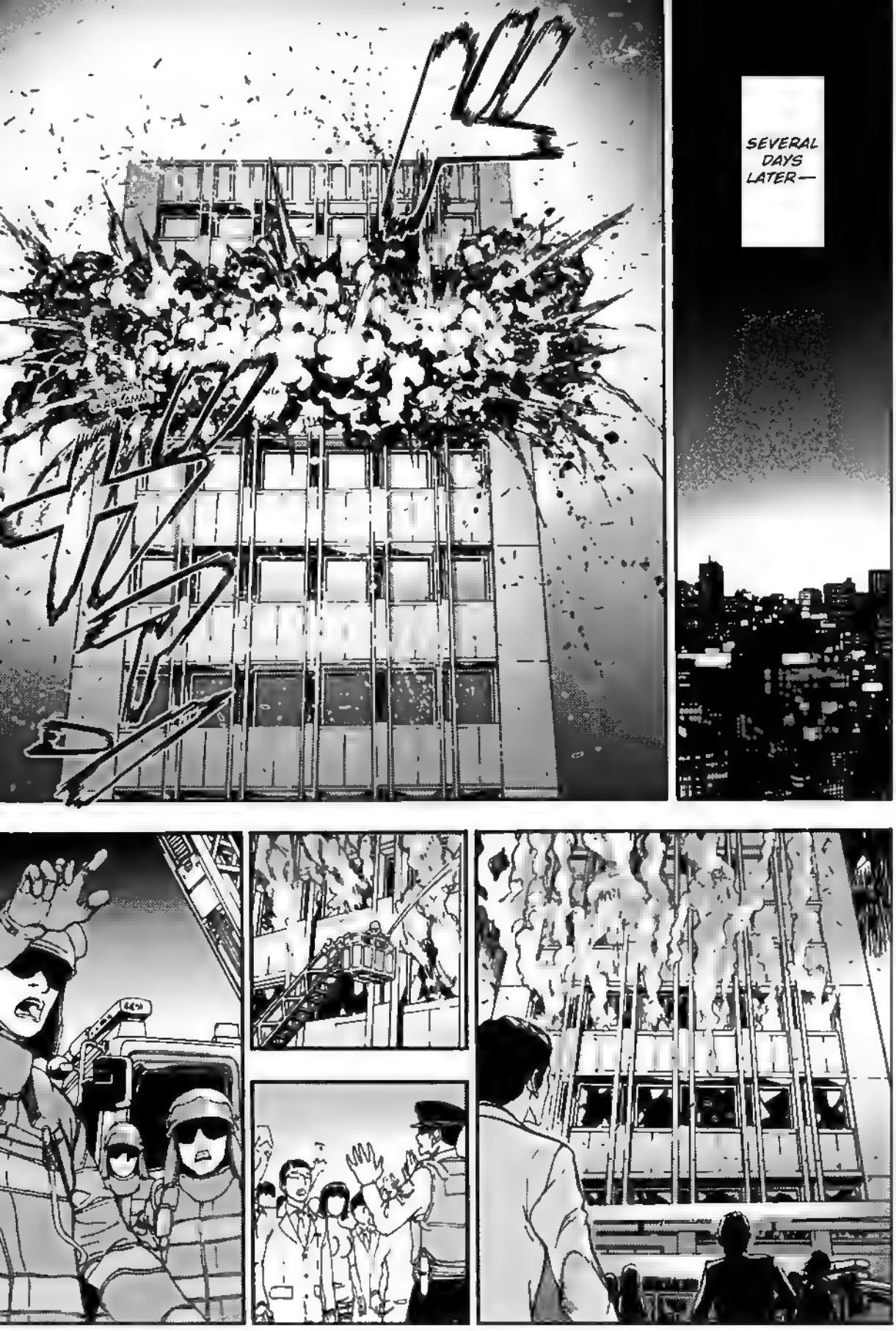
...LIAR...
HE CAUGHT THE TIP OF MY BATON PERFECTLY.


NORMALLY ONE STRIKES DOWN AT THE TIP OF THE OPPONENT'S DESCENDING SWORD.
THIS INTERSECTION IS THE ULTIMATE COMBINATION— AN ATTACKING SWING THAT SUCCEEDS AT DEFENDING AS WELL.
BY STRIKING IT AND DEFLECTING ITS PATH, YOU DEFEND AGAINST THE ENEMY'S ATTACK DURING YOUR SWING.

A TECHNIQUE FROM THE SINGLE-BLADED MAKABE SCHOOL.
SINCE IT'S MEANT TO CHIP AWAY AT THE ENEMY'S SWING...

...IT'S KNOWN AS THE "BLADE-CHIPPER."
AND THIS IS WHAT'S POSSIBLE WHEN THAT SKILL IS MASTERED...
THAT WAS QUITE A SHOW YOU PUT ON.
!?
バラ
BARA (CRUMBLE)

I HAVE NO MEANS TO STOP YOU ANYMORE, ANYWAY.
DO AS YOU WILL.
LIKE WE AGREED, I'M TAKING EBATA WITH ME.
IT WAS ONLY POSSIBLE AGAINST A SKILLED OPPONENT WHOSE BLADE WOULDN'T WAVER.
YOU HAVE MY WORD.
...I WILL RISK MY LIFE TO STOP YOU.
HOWEVER! IF YOU ACT IRRESPONSIBLY TOWARD ANY OTHER CIVILIANS...


SEVERAL DAYS LATER—

WHO THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE TALKING TO?
WILL THAT DO THE JOB?

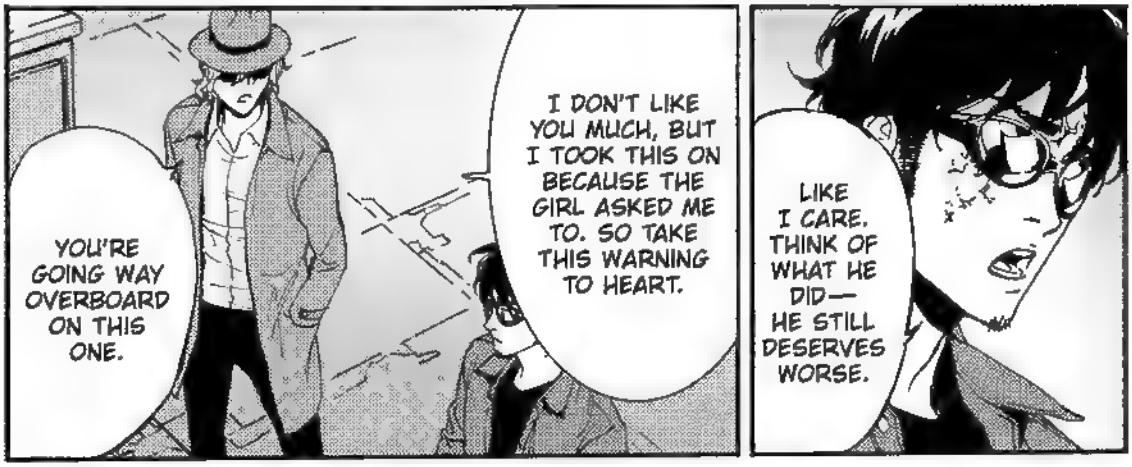
LOCATION, EXPLOSION, AND SET-UP.
I MADE SURE NONE OF THESE HARMED ANYONE.
I DON'T KNOW. I ONLY KNOW YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE AN EXPLOSIVES EXPERT.

PRETTY EXTREME OPINION FOR SOME-ONE IN THE ORGANIZA-TION.
WHY ARE YOU ACTING THIS WAY THOUGH?
YOU WOULDN'T FEEL ANY REMORSE ABOUT CUTTING THAT SCUMBAG IN TWO.
TEARING IT DOWN GIVES THEM A PERFECTLY GOOD REASON TO REBUILD. NOW EVERY-ONE'S HAPPY.
THEY DISCOVERED A DANGEROUS STRUCTURAL FLAW IN THAT BUILDING, AND THE COMPANY WAS DEBATING WHETHER TO SELL IT OFF OR DISMANTLE IT THEMSELVES.

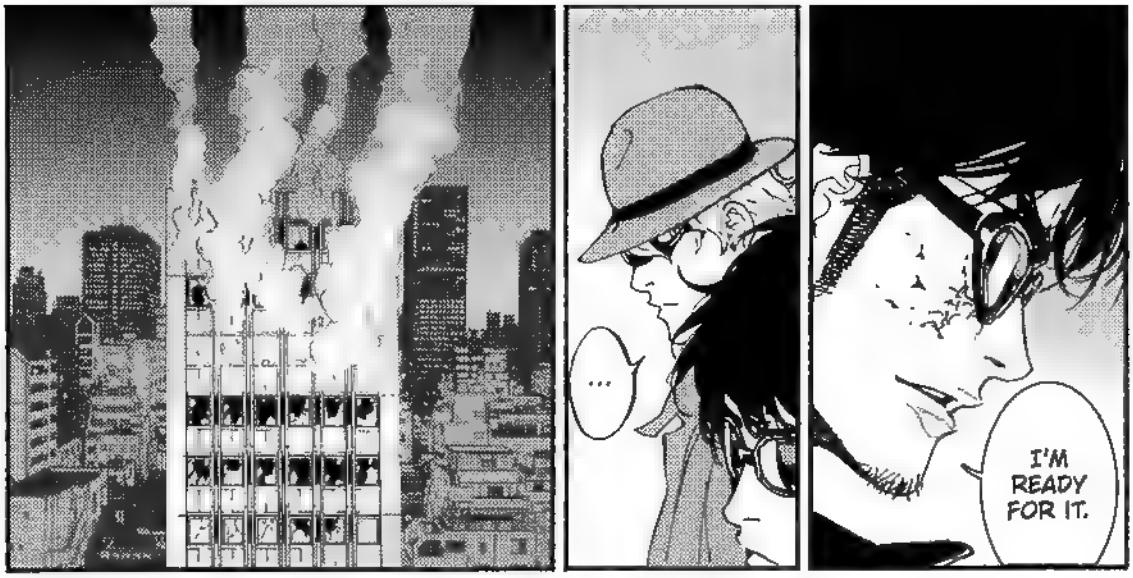
I'M A FREELANCE DEMOLITION MAN. SOME FOLKS KNOW ME BY THE HANDLE "PYRO."
YOUR BOSS SAVED MY ASS WHEN A PREVIOUS CLIENT WAS PREPARED TO KILL ME AFTER OUR BUSINESS PARTNER STABBED US IN THE BACK.
THAT'S BECAUSE I'M NOT IN THE NETWORK.
THE INJURY TO THE BOSS'S LEG WAS MY FAULT. I'M FUCK AROUND UNTIL HE'S BETTER.
BUT I DON'T WANT DOIN' THE WORK HERE BE KILLING AS S WE FIND PEOPLE.
YOU SEEM PRETTY ENDURABLE FOR A CRIMINAL.

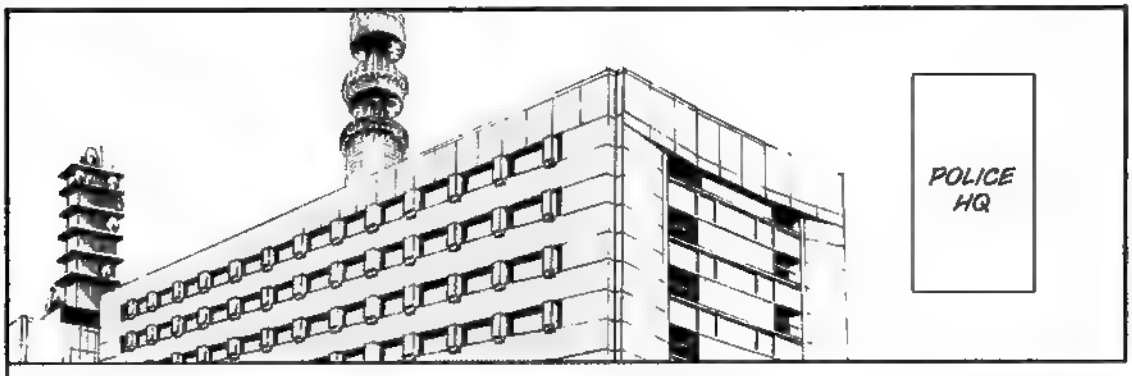
AND HOW WILL THE POLICE KNOW THAT?
OUR STORY IS THAT HE "PASSED OUT ON A LOWER FLOOR."
WHILE TRYING TO FLEE THE BUILDING, THE EXPLOSION "HAPPENED EARLIER THAN HE PLANNED."
WHAT ABOUT EBATA?
I INTENTIONALLY PUT IN A PART THAT USES A DIFFERENT WAVELENGTH...
...WHICH CAUSED THE DIGITAL TIMER TO COUNT DOWN EARLIER THAN IT SHOULD HAVE.
THE REST IS A SIMPLE ENOUGH BOMB THAT EVEN AN AMATEUR LIKE HIM COULD PUT IT TOGETHER.
THIS'LL PUT HIM UP THE CREEK FOR ANOTHER TWENTY OR THIRTY YEARS.
I SEE... A REAL PRO JOB, MOCKED UP TO LOOK CRUDE.

THAT'S A LOT OF WORK TO FRAME A GUY...
BY THE TIME HE BREATHES FRESH AIR AGAIN, HE'LL BE LIKE TAROU URASHIMA, WELL INTO HIS FIFTIES.
IF HE ACTUALLY GETS OUT ON GOOD BEHAVIOR BEFORE THEN, I'LL JUST GO AFTER HIM AGAIN.


YOU'RE GOING WAY OVERBOARD ON THIS ONE.
I DON'T LIKE YOU MUCH, BUT I TOOK THIS ON BECAUSE THE GIRL ASKED ME TO. SO TAKE THIS WARNING TO HEART.
LIKE I CARE. THINK OF WHAT HE DID— HE STILL DESERVES WORSE.

YOU'D BETTER EXPECT THE NETWORK TO COME DOWN ON YOU.





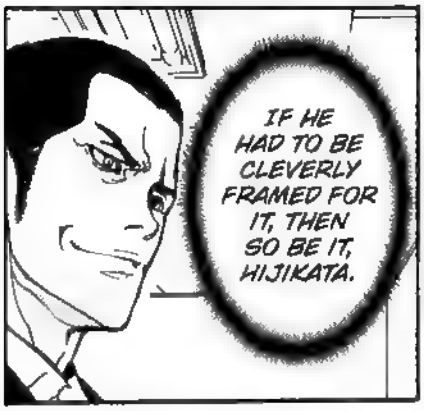
SIGN: INTERROGATION ROOM

証拠品
HE CLAIMS HE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT, BUT THEN THEY FOUND THAT PARTIALLY-MADE BOMB IN HIS ATTIC, SO...
BASED ON THE MESSAGE LEFT REGARDING THE EXPLOSION, IT'D FALL UNDER "ECO-TERRORISM."
...

ON THIS CASE ALONE, WE CAN SLAP HIM WITH TERRORISM, BOMBING, DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY, ASSAULT, ATTEMPTED MURDER...
HE'S GOT PRIORS, AND WHO KNOWS WHAT OTHER STUFF HE COULD HAVE GOTTEN UP TO THAT WE JUST DON'T KNOW ABOUT?
WE'VE GOT PRINTS ON THE EXPLOSIVES AT THE SCENE, SO BASED ON EVIDENCE ALONE...
...WE CAN MAKE A PRETTY AIRTIGHT CASE.
IF WE TURN UP ANYTHING ELSE DURING THE INVESTI-GATION...
A MOUNTAIN OF CHARGES WITH NOT A SINGLE FACTOR IN HIS FAVOR.
PROBABLY WON'T FIND A BETTER SAYING TO SUM UP THIS ONE.
YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW.
...HE COULD BE LOOKING AT DEATH ROW...

COME ON, GENDA-SAN.
THAT'S NOT RIGHT...
HA HA HA HA HA HA !!
BWA HA HA...
GA HA HA HA HA HA HA!!
HEH HEH..

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN A MORE PICTURE-PERFECT EXAMPLE OF "REAPING WHAT YOU SOW"!?
SHUT UP AND LET ME LAUGH.


IF HE HAD TO BE CLEVERLY FRAMED FOR IT, THEN SO BE IT, HIJIKATA.

THIS IS THE PERFECT PUNISHMENT FOR A DESPICABLE, COWARDLY SLIMEBALL WHO ONLY TARGETED THOSE WEAKER THAN HIMSELF.
IT'S OUR JOB TO ENSURE THAT CRIMINALS GET CHARGED WITH THE CRIMES THEY COMMITTED AND SERVE THEIR SENTENCES.

!?
WOULD SUCH A CRAFTY, CLEVER MAN REALLY INTENTIONALLY KILL MASTER?

GUESS I'LL REOPEN THAT CASE FOR MYSELF AND EXPOSE HIS TRUE NATURE...
SOMETHING WRONG?
NO. NOTHING.

GU (BLUB)
GU
(FIZZZ)

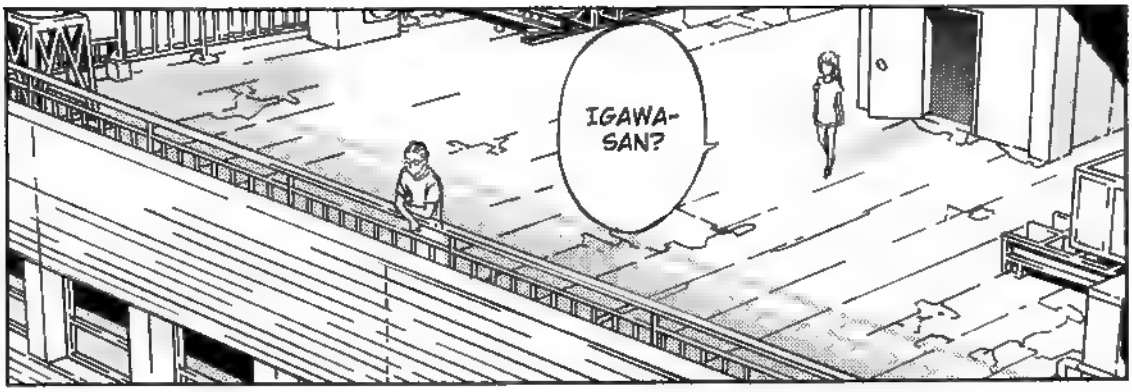
PASHI (THAK)
BUN (WHOOSH)

IN FACT, I THINK IT'S ABOUT TIME THEY PUT THAT ONE BACK ON THE TABLE.
I ONLY DID IT BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT IGAWA TOLD ME TO DO.
...I WOULDN'T HAVE MINDED DRAGGING HIM THROUGH THE ENTIRE CITY AND FINISHING UP WITH A PUBLIC CRUCIFIXION.

...LIKE A MAN OUT OF TIME...

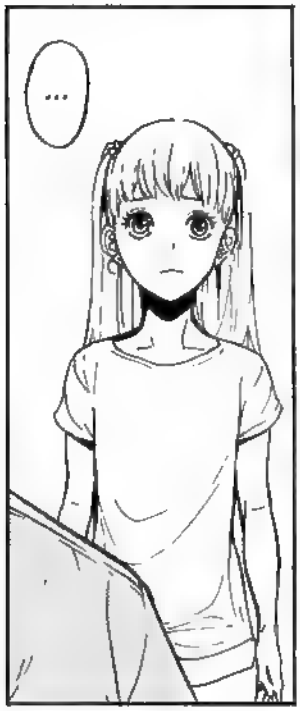
SURE THING.
FOOD'S NEARLY DONE. CALL IGAWA DOWN HERE.

chapter 163


IGAWA-SAN?

...UM...
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

...AH.


...

...TURNS OUT THAT REVENGE...
... DOESN'T FEEL GREAT AFTER ALL.

...

WOULD MAHO .
MAYBE I WAS WRONG.
MAYBE I'D FEEL BETTER IF I'D KILLED HIM, LIKE MAMORU SAID.
...FORGIVE ME FOR LETTING IT END LIKE THIS?

I KEPT SEEING FUTURES WHERE THE CULPRIT WAS DEAD OR ALIVE, BACK AND FORTH.
IT WAS LIKE ANY LITTLE THING COULD HAVE DECIDED HIS FATE.
WHEN WE WERE CHASING HIM DOWN, I COULD TELL YOU WERE CONFLICTED.
BUT THE ONLY TRULY PERMANENT DECISION WOULD BE KILLING HIM.
AND IF YOU REALLY DO END UP FEELING LIKE THIS WAS THE WRONG CHOICE, YOU HAVE THE OPTION OF CLEARING UP THE FALSE CHARGES.
I DON'T THINK I'LL EVER WANT TO DO THAT...
...BUT I SUPPOSE YOU'RE RIGHT.

NOT EVEN MAMORU-SAN OR THE PEOPLE IN THE NETWORK KNOW WHAT THE REAL "RIGHT ANSWER" IS.
...
FUTURES WHERE THE CULPRIT WAS ALIVE OR DEAD...
...AND I WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR HARUKA HAVING TO SEE THOSE AWFUL SCENES...

...
LET'S EAT DINNER, THEN.
SURE ...
ガチャ
GACHA (CLICK)

GOOD.
HERE YOU ARE, SIR.
BATAN. (THUMP)
ONLY BECAUSE HE TOLD ME THIS WAS FOR YOUR SAKE.
...LITTLE MISS... I'M TAKIN' CARE OF THIS OLD FELLA ON YOUR BODY-GUARD'S BEHALF.

WE'LL NEED MANY DIFFERENT TALENTS ON THE GROUND.
FOR NOW, PRO-CURING TALENT.
AND WHAT'S YOUR PLAN?
POLICE HQ
GENDA-SAN.
YEAH?

FOR ME!?
JOURNALIST?
IT'S THROUGH SOME KIND OF KENDO THING—
WE'VE GOT A REQUEST FROM A JOURNALIST ASKING FOR YOU BY NAME.
DON'T BE STUPID. THAT MIGHT BE THE STORY WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT...
...BUT I'VE NEVER ACTUALLY BEEN IN A TOURNAMENT. WHY WOULD A PUBLIC SOURCE COME TALK TO ME!?
WELL, YOU WERE THE PERENNIAL CHAMPIONSHIP CANDIDATE, RIGHT? IT SHOULDN'T BE THAT STRANGE ...
SAID THEY WANTED TO SPEAK ABOUT THE "BLADE DEMON."

STRANGE THAT HE'D ACCEPT...
UH, OKAY.
WE'LL MEET OUTSIDE, SO GET A NAME AND LOCATION FROM THEM.
I'M FREE AT THREE O'CLOCK TODAY.
...
IT'LL BE AT A CAFÉ IN YUURAKU-CHO. THE WRITER'S NAME IS TOORU MIZUSAWA.
IT CAN'T BE...
TOORU MIZUSAWA? I'VE HEARD THAT NAME BEFORE ...

THAT'S IT!
BUT... WHERE? HMMM...
NOT THE POLICE, NOT A CRIMINAL, SOMETHING LESS OBVIOUS.
DAMN... NOW I WISH I HADN'T SAID YES.
A REAL MUCKRAKER TYPE, DIGGING UP ALL KINDS OF SCANDALOUS DIRT ON THE FIGHTING WORLD.
...HE'S THAT SPORTS-WRITER ...
FORGET IT!!
AHH, ENOUGH OF THIS!!
...
...
...

...
I CAN'T FOCUS ON WORK UNTIL I CLEAR THIS UP.
THAT'S PER-FECT.
I'LL BE ABLE TO DRAIN HIM OF EXACTLY THE INFOR-MATION I NEED.
FIGURES THAT SNEAKY LITTLE RAT WANTS SOME PRIVATE DIRT ON HIJIKATA'S MURDER OF OUR TEACHER SO HE CAN TURN IT INTO A BIG SCANDAL.

GENDA-SAN, I PRESUME?
!?
MIZUSAWA.
AND... YOU ARE ...???

...THAT LITTLE PRICK FAILED TO MENTION THE MOST CRUCIAL PART...
READERS FIND IT HARDER TO TRUST AN ARTICLE WITH A WOMAN'S NAME ON THE BYLINE.
IT'S A PEN NAME.
...A WOMAN?

IT SEEMS YOU ALREADY UNDERSTAND WHAT I WANT, DON'T YOU?

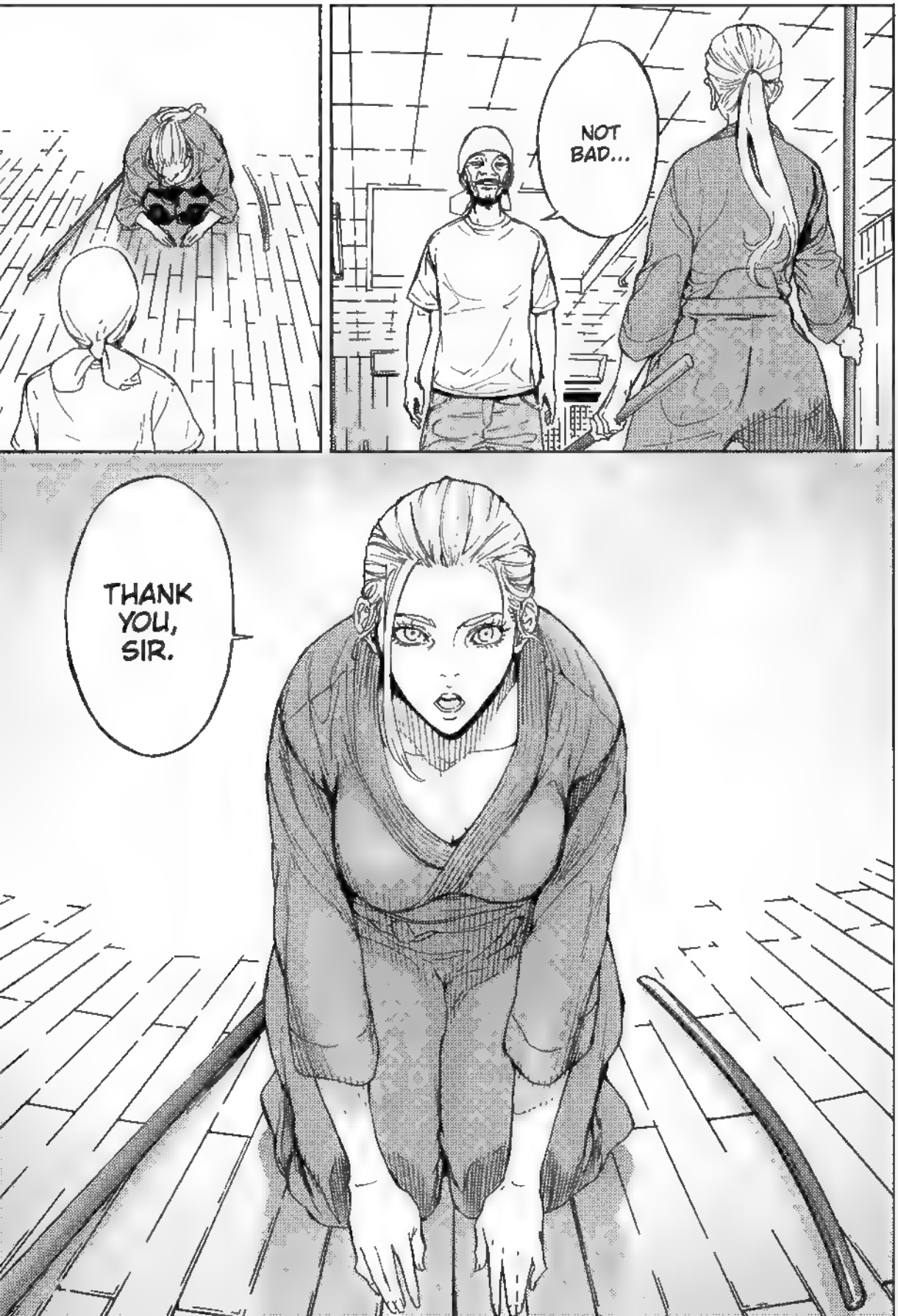
...

IT'S A STEREO-TYPE.
PEOPLE ASSUME THAT A WOMAN CANNOT POSSIBLY BE AS WELL VERSED IN SPORTS OR MARTIAL ARTS.

HOKKAIDO

TSU
(PAUSE)
BUN
(WHOOSH)

GA
GA
GA (WHAM)
GA
HYU (SWISH)


NOT BAD...
THANK YOU, SIR.

HEH HEH.
BUT I GOT A REAL GOOD STORY OUT OF IT.
I BET THAT WRITER'S GONE TO GENDA, JUST LIKE I TOLD HER TO.
...
I'LL HAVE TO GO AND SHARE IT WITH HIM LATER.

IT'S NONE OF MY CONCERN.
IT'S MAMORU HIJIKATA WHOM I WANT TO COVER.
…

I'M RESEARCHING THE TRUTH BEHIND THE PRODIGY OF THE ANCIENT SWORD STYLE.
...

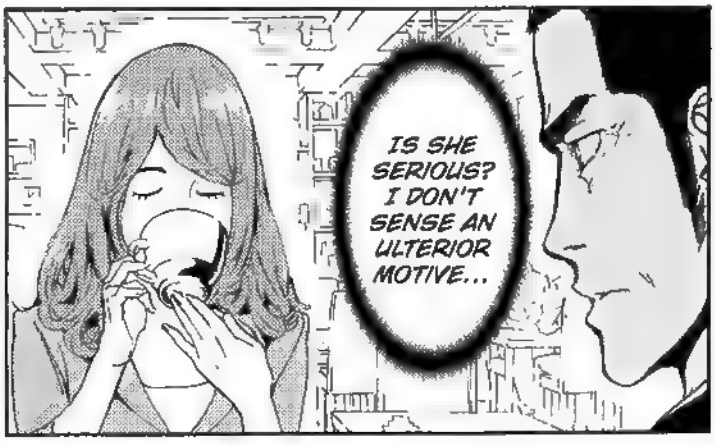
chapter 164

スッ
SU (SHFF)

IS IT... WORTHY OF A BOOK?
I WOULD LIKE TO TURN HIS STORY INTO A NONFICTION BOOK.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, COVER HIJIKATA?

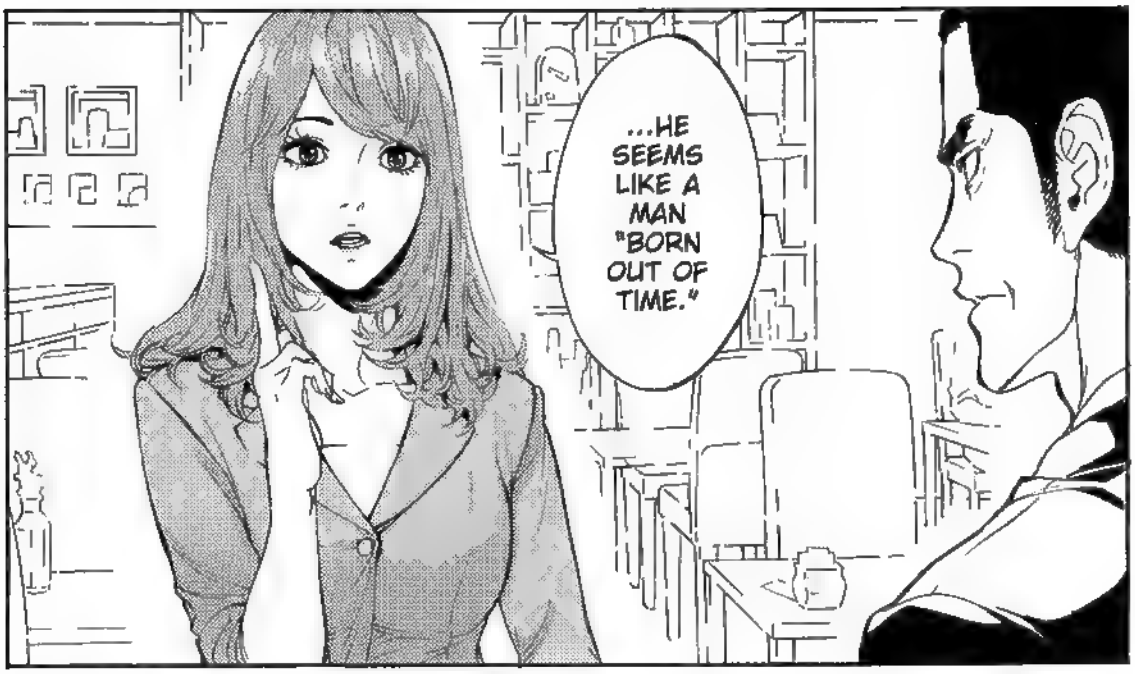
BASED ON MARKETABILITY, IT COULD BE, OR PERHAPS NOT. BUT I WANT TO WRITE ABOUT IT ANYWAY.
A GOOD PRODUCT IS ALWAYS WORTH THE TROUBLE.

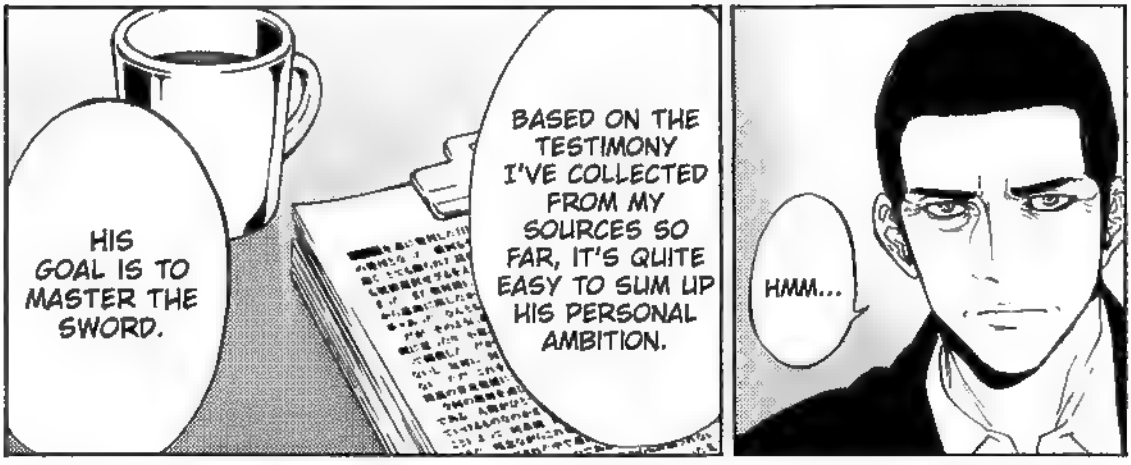
...WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO WRITE ABOUT HIM?

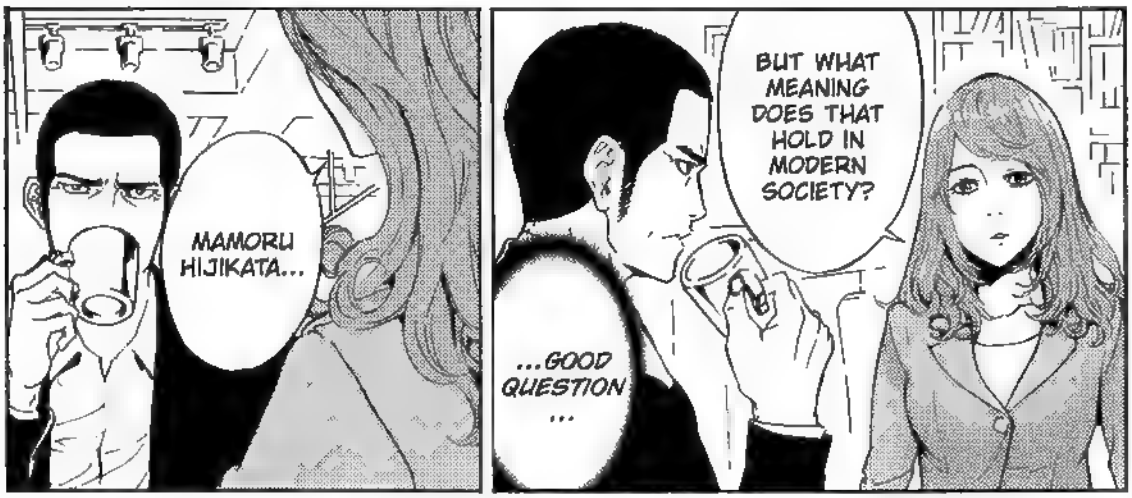

IS SHE SERIOUS? I DON'T SENSE AN ULTERIOR MOTIVE...

NOT TO BRAG OR ANYTHING, BUT EVEN I'M BETTER KNOWN IN THE COMBAT WORLD THAN HE IS.
HE'S ONE OF THOSE SWORD MASTERS WHOSE NAME IS ONLY KNOWN IN RARIFIED CIRCLES.

I'M ASHAMED TO SAY THAT I HAVE TO RESORT TO WRITING SUCH ARTICLES IN ORDER TO MAKE A LIVING.
BUT I'VE NEVER MADE UP A STORY JUST TO SELL COPIES
YES... AT FIRST IT WAS JUST A PAGE-THREE INTEREST PIECE ABOUT A "DISCIPLE KILLING HIS MASTER."
I'VE SEEN YOUR WORK.
JUST NEVER READ IT— NOT MY TASTE.
BUT THE MORE I LOOKED INTO IT, THE MORE FASCINATING I FOUND HIM AS A PERSON.
WHAT ABOUT HIM DREW YOUR EYE?
LET'S SEE.... IF I HAD TO PUT IT INTO WORDS...

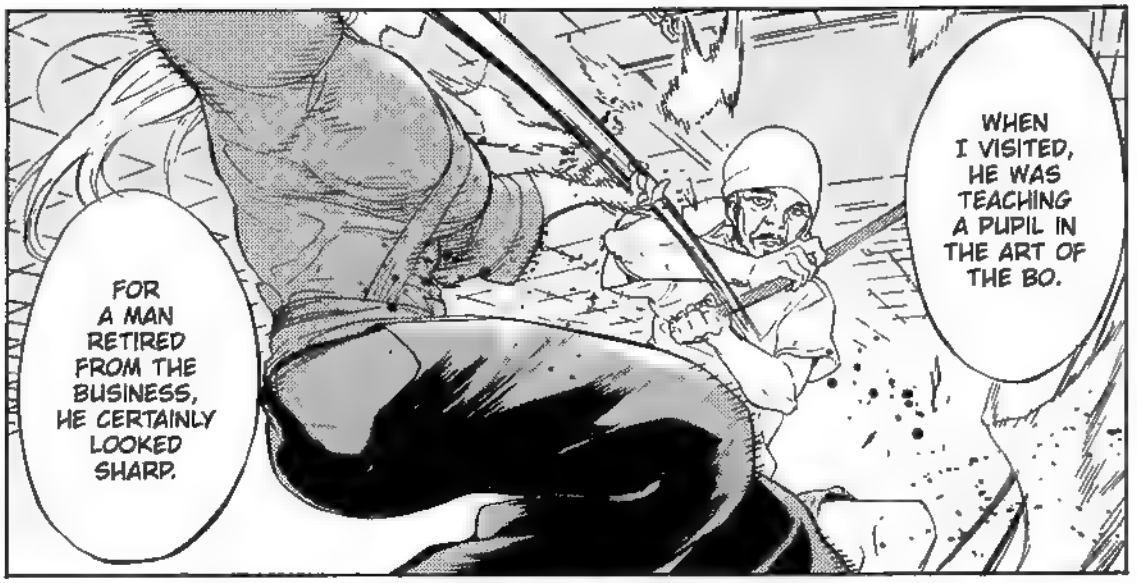

...HE SEEMS LIKE A MAN "BORN OUT OF TIME."

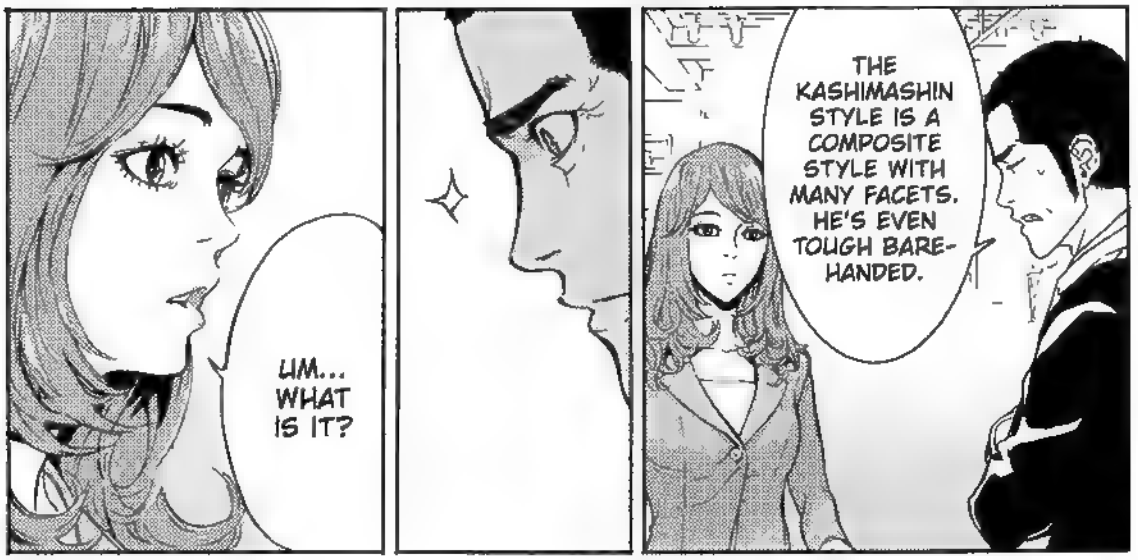

HIS GOAL IS TO MASTER THE SWORD.
BASED ON THE TESTIMONY I'VE COLLECTED FROM MY SOURCES SO FAR, IT'S QUITE EASY TO SUM UP HIS PERSONAL AMBITION.
HMM...


MAMORU HIJIKATA...
...GOOD QUESTION ...
BUT WHAT MEANING DOES THAT HOLD IN MODERN SOCIETY?

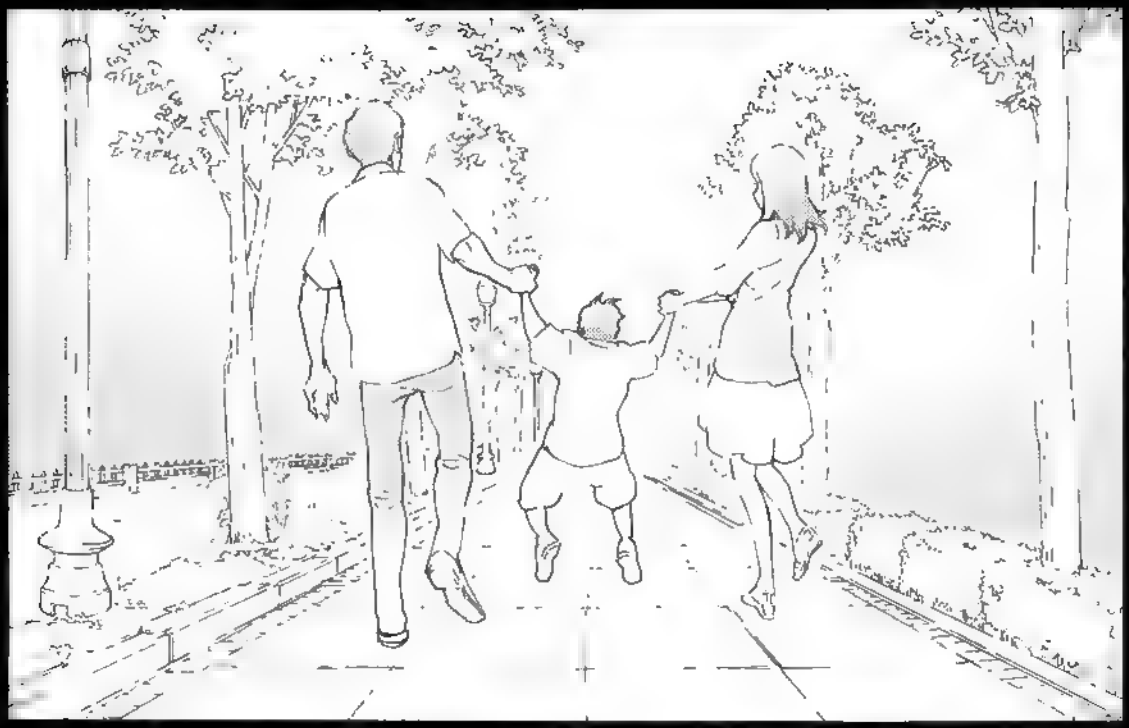
IT'S A FIXATION ON MARTIAL WAYS THAT TRANSCENDS THE BOUNDARY OF MERE SPORT.
CAN YOU IMAGINE A MORE FASCINATING INDIVIDUAL?
...POSSESSES A SENSE OF INTRANSIGENCE AS HE STRUGGLES WITH MODERN SOCIETY, AND THE TOUGHNESS OF SPIRIT TO CONTINUE ALONG HIS PATH.
IN THE FIVE YEARS SINCE HE VANISHED FROM CENTER STAGE, HE'S WANDERED AROUND TO SCHOOLS OF THE OLD WAYS...
AND FINALLY, THE SENSEI FROM THE KASHIMASHIN SCHOOL TOLD ME THAT YOU WERE LIKELY THE LAST TO SEE HIM.
TO AN OUTSIDER, I'M SURE HE MUST SEEM VERY INTRIGUING.
...I SEE...

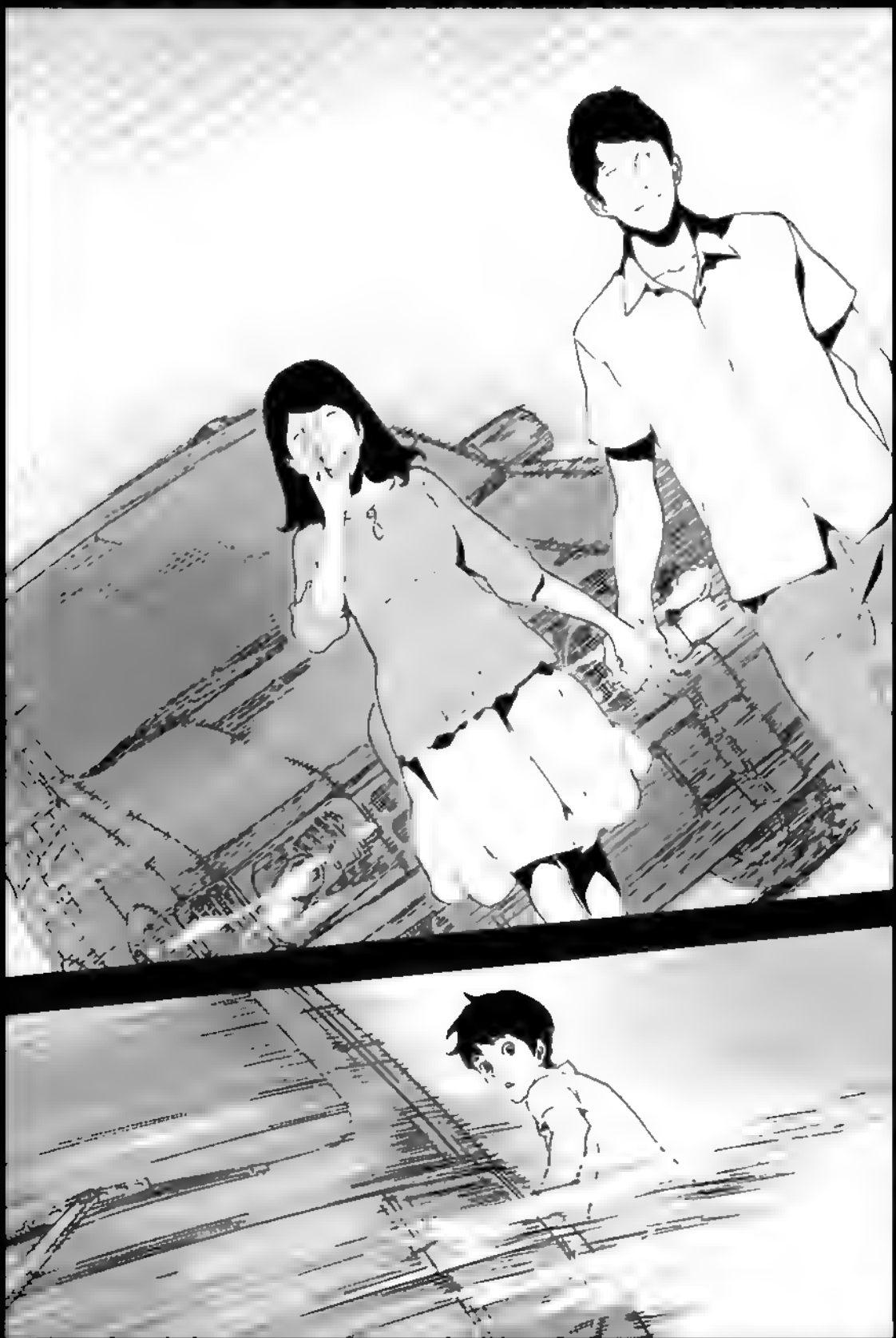
...THE OLD BLABBER-MOUTH...


FOR A MAN RETIRED FROM THE BUSINESS, HE CERTAINLY LOOKED SHARP.
WHEN I VISITED, HE WAS TEACHING A PUPIL IN THE ART OF THE BO.


UM... WHAT IS IT?
THE KASHIMASHIN STYLE IS A COMPOSITE STYLE WITH MANY FACETS. HE'S EVEN TOUGH BARE-HANDED.

OF COURSE. I'M SORRY TO KEEP YOU LIKE THIS.
DO YOU MIND IF WE MEET AGAIN AFTER WORK HOURS?
I DON'T HAVE THE TIME TO GO INTO DETAIL OR READ THIS OVER.
HERE'S WHERE WE SHOULD MEET...
ABOUT TWENTY YEARS EARLIER—





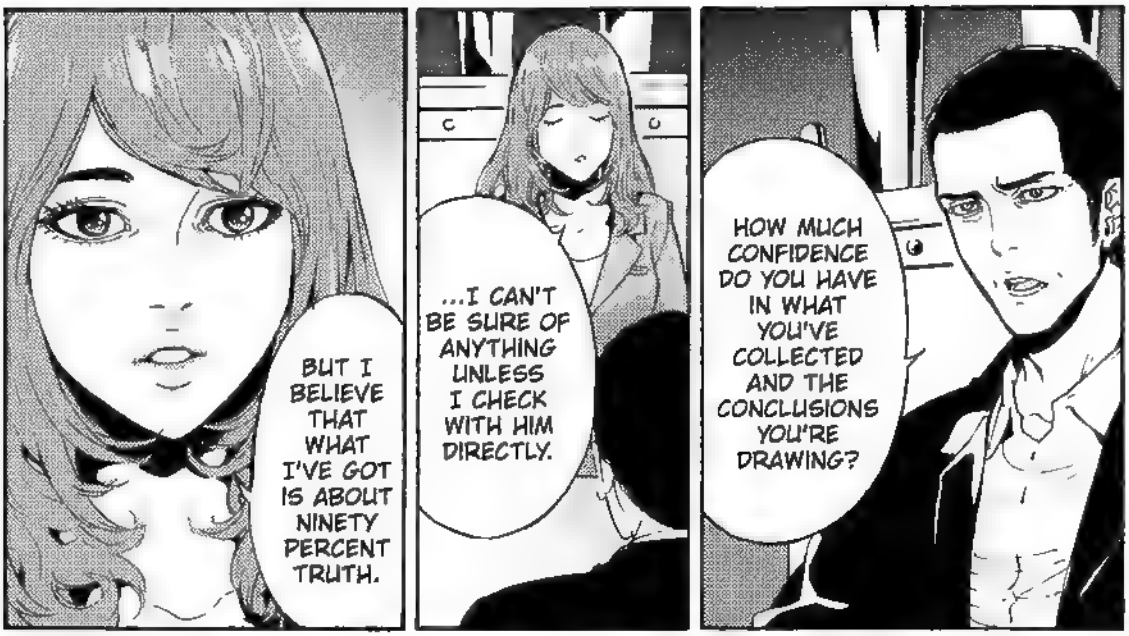
MAMORU LOST HIS PARENTS TO AN ACCIDENT CAUSED BY A DRUNK DRIVER.
AS A LONGTIME PRACTITIONER OF THE JIKISHINKAGE STYLE, HE WAS A DISCIPLINED MAN.
HE WAS SENT TO LIVE WITH KATSUNOSHIN HIJIKATA, HIS PATERNAL GRANDFATHER AND ONLY LIVING RELATIVE.

THIS WAS MAMORU HIJIKATA'S FIRST BRUSH WITH THE ANCIENT WAYS.
BUT THE BOY LEARNED SO RAPIDLY, AS IF FILLING THE VOID LEFT BY HIS PARENTS' DEATHS...
ONCE HE SHOWED INTEREST IN THE SWORD, MAMORU'S GRAND-FATHER WAS INITIALLY HIS DIRECT TEACHER.
BASED ON HIS AGE, THE MAN DETERMINED THAT HE COULD NOT TEACH HIS GRANDSON EVERYTHING.
...THAT HE SOON OUTGREW EVERY-THING THAT KATSU-NOSHIN COULD TEACH HIM.

KATSUNOSHIN TURNED TO HIS OLD FRIEND AND THE FOUNDER OF THE MAKABE ONE-HANDED STYLE, KAZUSHI MAKABE, TO INSTRUCT HIS GRANDSON.
THIS WAS MAMORU'S FIRST STEP ON THE PATH TO BECOMING A BLADE DEMON...

KII (CREAK)
TEA ROOM
"SIREN"
...
PASA (FLAP)
KO (TOK)
KO

THERE'S A YOUNG GIRL HERE. IT'S AWFULLY LATE—
THANKS FOR WAITING.
!?
OH, SHE'S THE STAR OF THIS PLACE.
SO I'LL TRUST YOU.
BASED ON WHAT I SEE IN YOUR WRITING, YOU SEEM HONEST AND THOROUGH IN YOUR APPROACH.
I APPRECIATE THAT.
ANYWAY, I TOOK A LOOK AT IT WHEN I HAD THE CHANCE DURING WORK— NOTHING TOO DEEP.


BUT I BELIEVE THAT WHAT I'VE GOT IS ABOUT NINETY PERCENT TRUTH.
...I CAN'T BE SURE OF ANYTHING UNLESS I CHECK WITH HIM DIRECTLY.
HOW MUCH CONFIDENCE DO YOU HAVE IN WHAT YOU'VE COLLECTED AND THE CONCLUSIONS YOU'RE DRAWING?

THE OLDER STUDENTS FROM HIS DOJO CLAIM THAT HE UNDER-TOOK EVERY TRAINING METHOD HE COULD, REGARDLESS OF STYLE, EVEN ON HEARSAY.
AFTER THAT, MAMORU SANK HIS LIFE INTO THE SWORD LIKE A SOUL POSSESSED.

WHEN HE HEARD ABOUT THE "TREE-STRIKING" EXERCISE OF THE JIGEN STYLE...
...HE DID IT ALL DAY LONG, UNTIL THE SKIN ON HIS PALMS HAD BEEN SCRAPED AWAY.

HE STAND IN WAIST-DEEP COLD WATER WHILE REPEATING HIS EXERCISES TO BETTER STRENGTHEN HIS LOWER HALF
AFTER HALF A DAY THE LOSS OF WARMTH LEFT HIM SO EXHAUSTED, HE COULDN'T STAND.

IN LATER YEARS, MAKABE WAS QUOTED AS SAYING...
"HE HAD BOTH THE APTITUDE AND THE UNYIELDING DRIVE TO ACHIEVE WHAT HE WANTED."
A BOY WHO WAS NOT YET TEN YEARS OLD.
SO WHERE IS MAMORU HIJIKATA NOW?
I REALLY NEED TO MEET AND SPEAK WITH HIM IN PERSON.
...IF THAT'S ALL TRUE, HE'S QUITE A CHARACTER ...
I PERFORMED AS MANY INTERVIEWS WITH OTHER STUDENTS AS I COULD.
UNLESS THEY'RE ALL LYING TOGETHER, I THINK WE CAN ASSUME IT'S THE TRUTH.

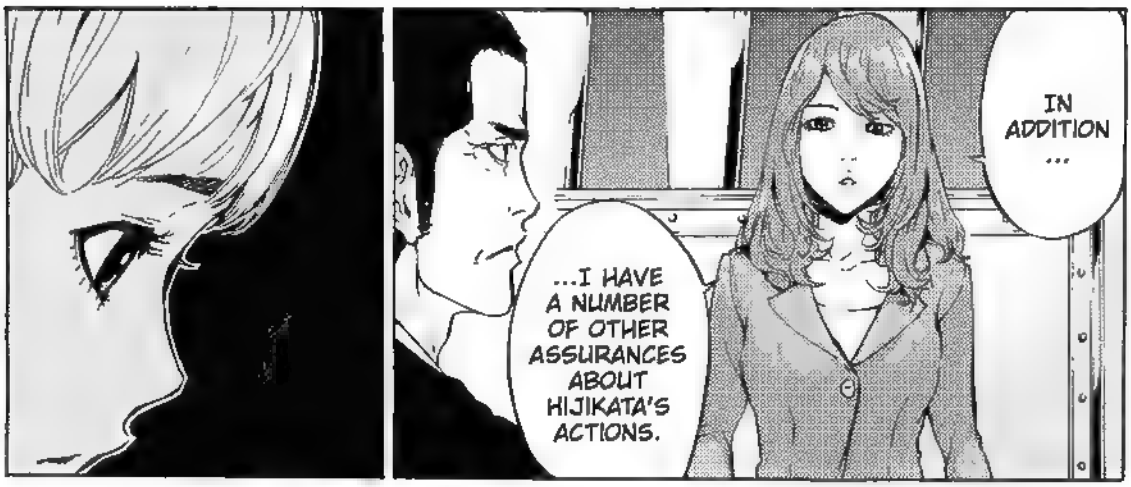
HIS EYESIGHT? IS THAT WHY HE DISAPPEARED FROM PUBLIC VIEW?
FOR REASONS THAT I DON'T KNOW, HIJIKATA HAS LOST HIS VISION.
BUT HE STILL CONTINUES DOWN THE PATH HE'S CHARTED FOR HIMSELF.
...

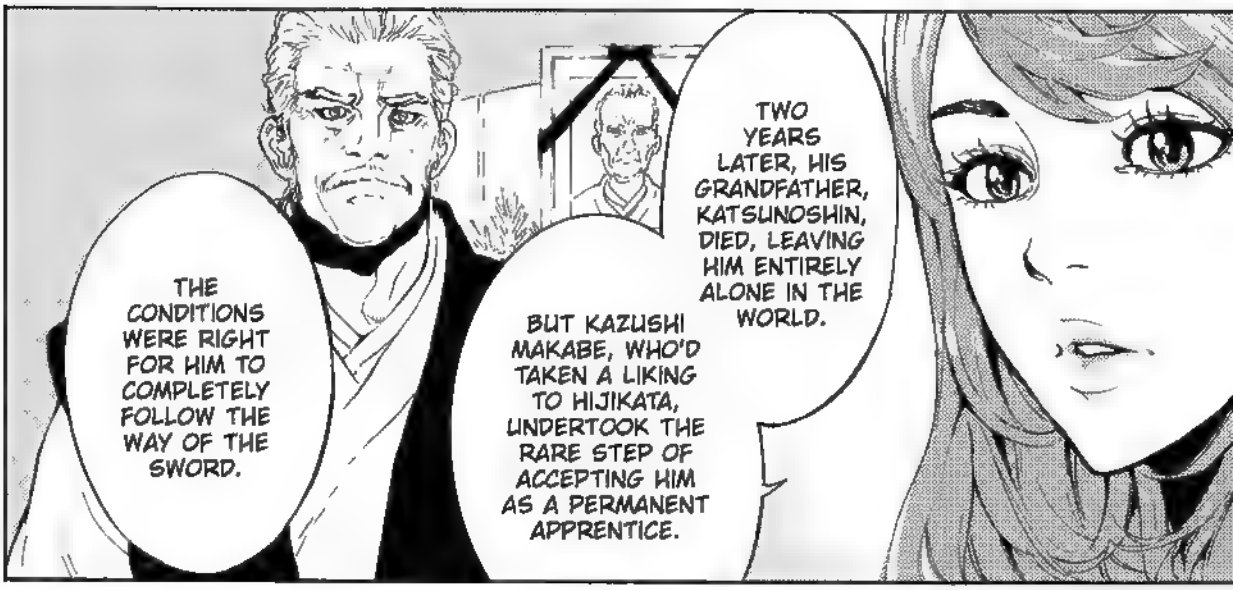
NO SURPRISE THIS TIME?
...
I THINK THAT'S A PERFECTLY NATURAL CHOICE FOR HIM.
NO, NO SURPRISE.
...

Until
Death
do us
Part

PURURURU (RRRR)
UNKNOWN NUMBER
PURURURU
DECLINE
ANSWER
AGENT GENDA INFORMED ME THAT HE MIGHT HAVE SOMETHING INTERESTING TO SAY TONIGHT.
...HELLO ...?

chapter 165
IF YOU'RE INTRIGUED, WHY DON'T YOU SIT IN?

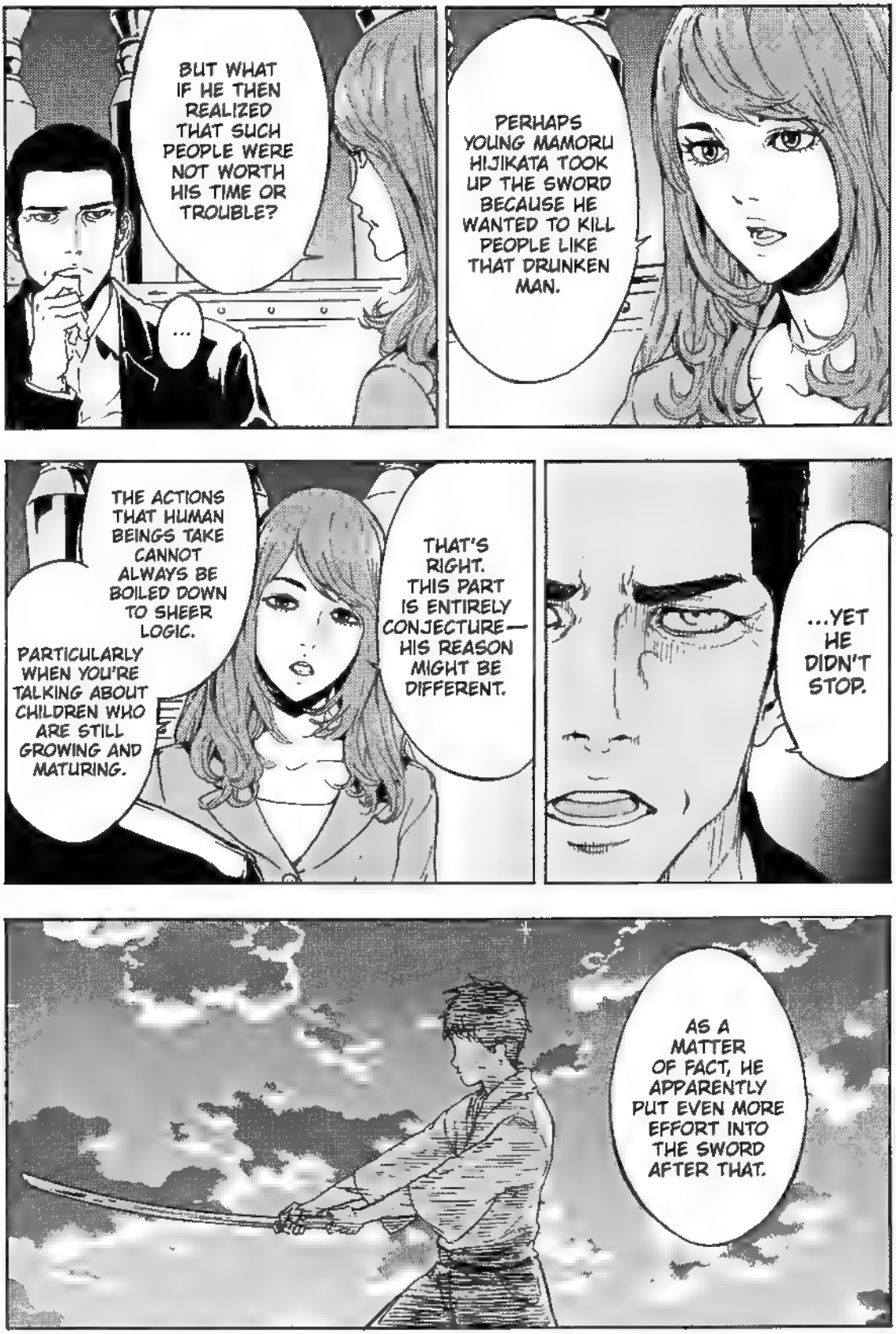

IN ADDITION ...
...I HAVE A NUMBER OF OTHER ASSURANCES ABOUT HIJIKATA'S ACTIONS.


TWO YEARS LATER, HIS GRANDFATHER, KATSUNOSHIN, DIED, LEAVING HIM ENTIRELY ALONE IN THE WORLD.
BUT KAZUSHI MAKABE, WHO'D TAKEN A LIKING TO HIJIKATA, UNDERTOOK THE RARE STEP OF ACCEPTING HIM AS A PERMANENT APPRENTICE.
THE CONDITIONS WERE RIGHT FOR HIM TO COMPLETELY FOLLOW THE WAY OF THE SWORD.

ONE DAY, IN HIS SECOND YEAR OF MIDDLE SCHOOL—

?
...
HIJIKATA...
HEY... WHAT'S UP?

JUST THINKING... THERE REALLY IS SCUM IN THIS WORLD.
THE LOOK IN HIS EYES— IT WAS LIKE HE WAS STARING AT A STONE ON THE GROUND.


BUT WHAT IF HE THEN REALIZED THAT SUCH PEOPLE WERE NOT WORTH HIS TIME OR TROUBLE?
...
PERHAPS YOUNG MAMORU HIJIKATA TOOK UP THE SWORD BECAUSE HE WANTED TO KILL PEOPLE LIKE THAT DRUNKEN MAN.
THE ACTIONS THAT HUMAN BEINGS TAKE CANNOT ALWAYS BE BOILED DOWN TO SHEER LOGIC.
PARTICULARLY WHEN YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT CHILDREN WHO ARE STILL GROWING AND MATURING.
THAT'S RIGHT. THIS PART IS ENTIRELY CONJECTURE— HIS REASON MIGHT BE DIFFERENT.
...YET HE DIDN'T STOP.
AS A MATTER OF FACT, HE APPARENTLY PUT EVEN MORE EFFORT INTO THE SWORD AFTER THAT.

SO THAT'S FOUR HOURS.
AND ANOTHER THREE HOURS FOR STANCE PRACTICE.
HIS TRAINING REGIMEN AT THE TIME WAS TEN THOUSAND SWINGS, MORNING AND NIGHT.
IN ORDER TO GIVE EACH AND EVERY SWING THE PROPER EFFORT, THIS PROCESS TOOK WELL OVER TWO HOURS.
HE SWEATED IT OUT WITH THE ADULTS IN THE DOJO UNTIL EVENING, AND THEN DID HIS NIGHTTIME SET.
ANOTHER HOUR OF STRIKING TREES AFTER THE DOJO CLOSED.
APPARENTLY, HE DESTROYED A NUMBER OF GIANT CEDARS OUT BACK BEHIND THE DOJO.
TWO HOURS OF WEIGHT TRAINING.
TWO HOURS OF LEGWORK IN THE POND.
...

DIDN'T HE GO TO SCHOOL!? WHEN DID HE SLEEP IN THE REMAINING NINE HOURS!?
BUT... THAT DOESN'T ADD UP!
THAT'S FIFTEEN HOURS OF TRAINING PER DAY.
...I SEE... SO HE BECAME A DEMON OF THE BLADE BECAUSE HE WAS MEANT TO.
I DON'T KNOW. GIVEN THAT EVERYONE NEEDS SLEEP...
...WE CAN IMAGINE THAT HE PROBABLY CAUGHT NAPS BETWEEN ACTIVITIES.
...THAT'S WHY HE CAN SLEEP WHEREVER HE WANTS ...

He's laying on the hook!
Takeda's trying to defend through it.
KAAN (CLANG)
HERE'S ANOTHER ANECDOTE.
That's the end of the fourth round! The fighters return to their corners.
NOT EVEN CONCERNED ABOUT THE DANGER OF THE OPPONENT CHARGING THEIR BACKS.
THEY TURN THEIR BACKS LIKE THAT JUST AFTER THE BELL.
WHERE ARE YOU GOING? WE'RE JUST GETTING TO THE GOOD STUFF.

UHH, I GUESS, BUT...
BUT THEY DON'T HAVE THAT!
THAT CHAMPION FROM SOUTH AMERICA A WHILE BACK KEPT HIS SPIRIT TO HIM.
OF COURSE NOT. IT'S A SPORT, NOT A SCHOOL OF COMBAT.
I HAVE NO INTEREST IN A COMPETITOR WHO DOESN'T KEEP HIS WITS ABOUT HIM EVERY SECOND.
BUT YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN A CAR MIGHT COME BARRELING DOWN ON YOU OUT OF NOWHERE.
IF YOUR OPPONENT'S GOING TO FOLLOW THE RULES AT ANY AND ALL TIMES, THEN FINE.

THAT'S WHEN I REALIZED THAT HE AND I HAD COMPLETELY DIFFERENT MINDSETS.
...
...HARUKA'S NOT AROUND...

TO HER FRIEND'S PLACE?
SHE'LL BE FINE THERE, THEN.
OH, YEAH... SHE HAD SOMETHING TO DO.
WENT DOWN TO SIREN.
ABOUT THAT EXTREME RESTOCKING YOU JUST DID...
HEY, MAMORU...
WHAT ARE YOU UP TO, MAN?

THAT WENT BEYOND RESTOCKING!
ARE YOU ARMING AN ENTIRE TEAM OF YOUR OWN!?
HAH... YOU'RE ON TO ME, HUH?
OF COURSE I AM!
.....
JUST DON'T ASK ME WHY— I KNOW IT AIN'T RIGHT.
THIS IS MY PROBLEM.
IF YOU FIND OUT WHY, SOME OF THE RESPONSIBILITY WILL FALL ON YOUR SHOULDERS.

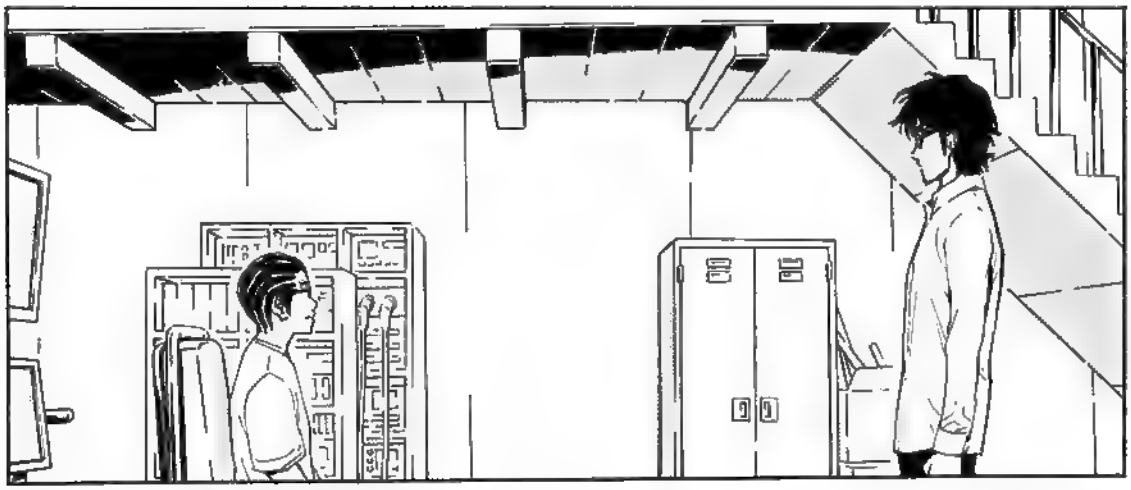
...IS IT ABOUT HARUKA...?
...
...
AFTER THE LAST INCIDENT, WHEN I WAS THE ONE AT THE CENTER...
...I REALIZED THAT MY OWN INDECISION WAS FORCING HARUKA TO SEE HORRIBLE POTENTIAL FUTURES I HADN'T INTENDED TO SHOW HER.

AS LONG AS SHE'S AROUND US, SHE HAS TO KEEP SEEING VISIONS OF YOU DYING OR KILLING OTHERS.
YOU REALIZE THAT, DON'T YOU!?

AND BECAUSE YOU KNOW THAT, YOU'VE BEEN HESITANT TO KEEP HER CLOSE BY, HAVEN'T YOU?

...

...I SEE... SO I WAS RIGHT...



EVEN I WAS A KID ONCE.

IT AIN'T A GOOD THING.

WHEN YOU SEE PEOPLE DYING, NASTY STUFF LIKE THAT, TOO EARLY ...
...YOU GROW UP REAL SCREWED UP, JUST LIKE ME.

GATA. (THUNK)
I'M SORRY... I NEVER EVEN THOUGHT ABOUT OR CONSIDERED THESE THINGS.
AND YET I WAS IRRESPONSIBLE AND GOT CARRIED AWAY IN MY IGNORANCE.
I DON'T BLAME YOU. IT'S AN EXTREME SET OF CIRCUM-STANCES.
WHAT WOULD BE BEST IS IF HARUKA WERE MORE OF AN ADULT, AND CAPABLE OF CHOOSING ON HER OWN.
BUT I ACTUALLY WISH YOU'D NEVER REALIZED ANY OF THIS.
HUH?

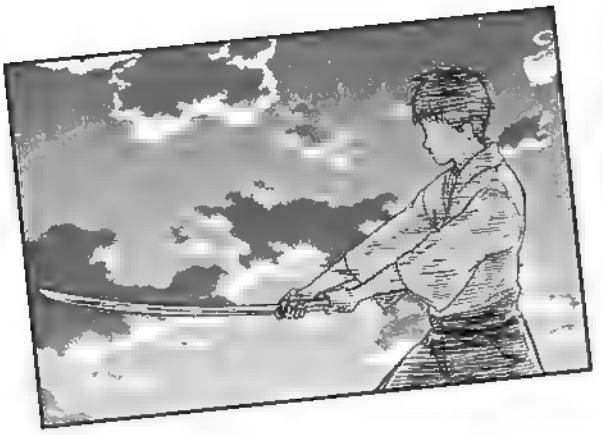
IF BOTH OF US ARE JUST SITTING AROUND WITH THAT HANGDOG LOOK, SHE'S GONNA GET AGGRAVATED, DON'TCHA THINK?
SHE ONLY NEEDS ONE PESSIMIST HANGING AROUND.

I'M READY TO TAKE ON WHATEVER RESPONSIBILITY IS NECESSARY FOR HARUKA'S SAKE. I'LL WORK FOR FREE MY WHOLE LIFE, IF THAT'S WHAT IT TAKES.
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE UP TO, BUT NOW THAT I'M AWARE OF IT, YOU GOTTA LET ME HELP!

HMM... I GUESS YOU'VE GOT A POINT...

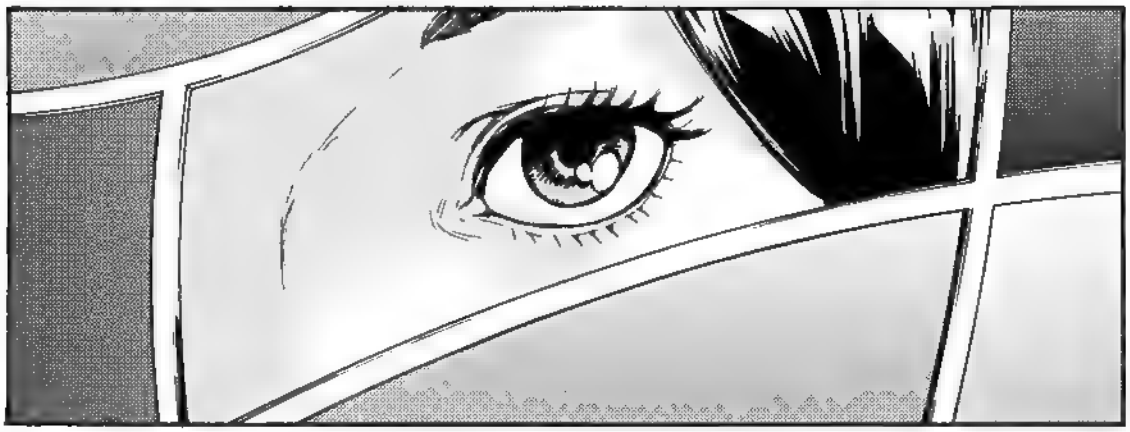
STILL NOT AS IMPORTANT AS A HUSBAND.
SHUT UP!
...YOU MAKE A GOOD BIG BROTHER, IGAWA...
...
TEA ROOM "SIREN"

WHO ARE THEY?



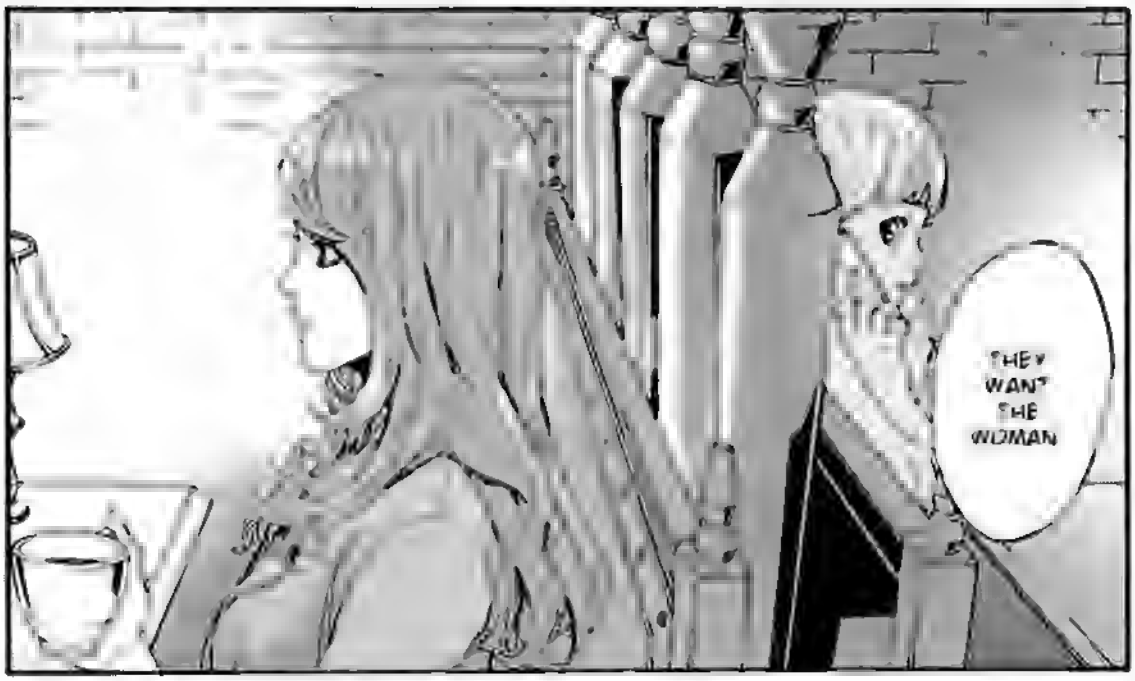
Until
Death
do us
Part

chapter 166



...THOUGHT SO...
OH YES, THEY'RE OUT THERE.

KARITO'S NOT HERE— HE HAD A NEW ASSIGNMENT TODAY.
MORE IMPOR-TANTLY...
WHERE'S TATE-SAN?
WE CAN'T CALL MAMORU-SAN BECAUSE THE DETECTIVE IS IN HERE...
...CAN YOU PREDICT THEIR OBJECTIVE?
...


THEY WANT THE WOMAN

They're going to abduct her before she reaches the main street.

IF THAT'S IT, THERE'S NO NEED TO USE ANY KIND OF FORCE.
IN A WORST-CASE SCENARIO, WE CAN STILL ENSURE HER SAFETY BY REFUSING TO LET HER LEAVE.

IS... IS THAT SO?

DON'T WORRY— NO ONE HAS EVER ATTACKED THIS STORE AND LEFT UNHARMED.

If the future changes, let me know.
YES.

!?
SPEAKING OF WHICH...

BA
(DUCK)
WHAM
WHOOSH

BA
(PWAP)
WHAT
THE...!?
...
TA
(TEK)

...YOU'RE NOT USING A NAGINATA OR ANYTHING.
WHY WOULD YOU SWING FOR MY SHINS?
YOU'RE REAL GOOD.
THERE'S NO WEAKNESS IN YOUR MINDSET— MUST BE BECAUSE YOU FIGHT TO APPREHEND CRIMINALS.
...

WHY ARE YOU SWINGING LIKE YOU DON'T CARE IF THE OPPONENT HITS YOU!?
IS IT BECAUSE THEY'RE ONLY USING A SHINAI!?
ISN'T SWORDPLAY PREDICATED UPON THE CONCEPT OF USING A REAL, DEADLY BLADE!?

HMPH... SO HE WAS TESTING ME.

HE'S A NATURAL, THEN.

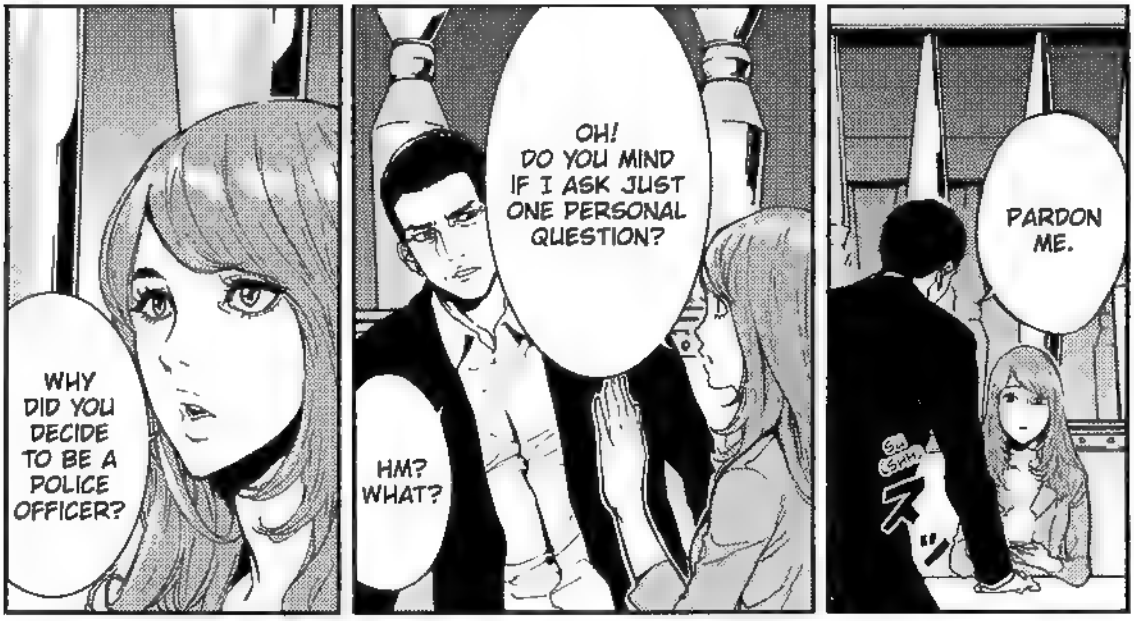
...IT'S EXACTLY HOW HE IS NOW...

SO THERE'S A STORY FROM MY OWN EXPE-RIENCE.

LOOKING BACK ON THESE ANECDOTES, IT SEEMS HE SHUNNED ANY UNNECESSARY DISTRACTIONS FROM A VERY YOUNG AGE...
...SO THAT HE COULD FOCUS PURELY ON THE SWORD AND POLISH HIS SKILL AS A SWORDSMAN.
WHAT'S YOUR OPINION OF THAT KIND OF LIFE?
...
...WELL...
HE MIGHT BE HAPPIER THAN ANYONE ELSE I KNOW.

DOING WHAT YOU LOVE AND SPENDING EVERY MOMENT OF YOUR LIFE IN ITS PURSUIT ...
...MIGHT MAKE YOU HAPPIER THAN ANYONE ELSE ON THE PLANET.
HUH!?
HAPPIER ???
EVEN IF IT MEANS ...
...THAT YOU WIND UP DYING IN A DITCH IN THE END.

...
KARITO IS ABSENT TODAY, SO PLEASE BE CAREFUL.
PLUS...
AGENT GENDA... JUST LISTEN, DON'T TURN AROUND.
THERE ARE SOME FOREIGN MEN WATCHING THIS BUILDING OUT FRONT.


PARDON ME.
Su-Sssh...
OH! DO YOU MIND IF I ASK JUST ONE PERSONAL QUESTION?
HM? WHAT?
WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO BE A POLICE OFFICER?

KILLING, STEALING, TRAMPLING THE RIGHTS OF INNOCENT CIVILIANS.
I'M NOT A PATIENT OR FORGIVING ENOUGH MAN TO STAND BY AND LET IT HAPPEN.
NO BIG REASON... I JUST DON'T LIKE CRIMINALS.

THAT'S A GOOD ANSWER ...
ブオオオ
スッ!

THIS IS NOT AN OPPONENT WHO WILL BEHAVE AS WE WISH.
WHAT'S UP? PROCURING MORE "TALENT"?
NO... JUST SOWING SEEDS THIS TIME.
KON (KNOCK)
KON
KII (CREAK)
PARDON ME.
WATCH CLOSELY.
WHAT IS THIS PLACE!? WE'RE NOT GONNA FIND ANYONE HERE.

AAAH!
ONE WRONG MOVE AND YOU'RE DEAD. IF YOU GET TOO CLOSE WITHOUT RAISING ANY WARNING SOUND...
...HE'LL HAVE YOU DEAD BEFORE YOU EVEN KNOW IT.
WH-WH-WH... WHO IS THIS!?

HIS NAME IS JESUS.
THE GREATEST ASSASSIN IN THE WORLD.

HE TOOK ON A HEAVY INJURY PROTECTING HIS STUDENTS AFTER CRUSHING "24."
OLD GOOSE PUT HIM UP HERE SO HE COULD LAY LOW AND RECOVER

!?
WAIT, "JESUS"!? LIKE... JESUS!?

I'M NOT IN THE MOOD FOR SARCASM.
I'M LETTING YOU LIVE BECAUSE I OWE YOU ONE.
LOOKING GOOD, JESUS.
WHAT IF I HAD SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT "DANTE 313"?
KASHIHARA'S NOT GOING TO GIVE YOU AN UPDATE UNTIL THE INFORMATION IS ROCK-SOLID.

*DANTE 313: A TRANSPLANT CONNECTION PLOT TO ABDUCT WOMEN AND FERTILIZE THEM, THEN HARVEST THE BABIES FOR ORGANS. IRONICALLY, THIS PLAN WAS HATCHED BECAUSE JESUS PUSHED THE YPC TO DESPERATION.

I DON'T KNOW. I THINK I'VE GOT THE STUPID-ASS SIMPLE PART FIGURED OUT.
SO LONG.
SO WHAT'S THE PLAN?
WAS THAT ALL YOU NEEDED TO DO?

HE'S THE WILD CARD IN THIS SCENARIO.
AND IT MOST CERTAINLY SUITS OUR PURPOSES NOT TO BE INVOLVED WITH HIS ACTIONS.
IT WAS MORE THAN ENOUGH. HE'S GOING TO ACT. IT JUST WON'T BE WHAT WE EXPECT.
UH... HUH?
AND NOW, WE'VE GOT SOME OTHER CARDS TO PREPARE.
ブオオオオ
BUCOO (VROOM)

DANTE
213
A HELL OF MY OWN CREATION

chapter 167

SO YOU'RE SAYING YOU NEVER GOT THAT BOMB IN YOUR TOOTH REMOVED? IT'S STILL IN THERE!?
IT WAS MEANT AS A SAFEGUARD AGAINST BETRAYAL.
THEY STUCK IT DEEP IN THE GUMS TO PREVENT EASY REMOVAL. IF WE GET TOO CUTE TRYING TO PULL IT OUT, IT COULD GO OFF.

IF THEY FIND OUT I'VE REMOVED IT, GENIE WILL STOP TRUSTING ME, AND OUR PLAN GOES UP IN SMOKE.
ALL THIS TROUBLE FOR NOTHING.
NOPE! IT'S A DEED THAT SYMBOLIZES MY TRUST-WORTHI-NESS.
OH, COME ON! IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE WITH ENOUGH TIME!
YOU KNOW THE NETWORK'S GOT THE RESOURCES TO REMOVE IT!
THIS IS RIDICU-LOUS...
IT PROTECTS AGAINST TREACHERY AND IS A MEASURE OF SILENCE IF WE FAIL.
WITHOUT THOSE THINGS, HE COMES TO RUIN.
RIDICULOUS OR NOT, HE NEEDS TO HAVE CONTROL OVER MY LIFE AS THE ACE UP HIS SLEEVE.

ANYWAY, DOESN'T IT HURT?
UNBE-LIEVABLE ...
...
HAVE YOU NOTICED ME BEING MORE IRRITABLE LATELY?
YEAH... IT'S BEEN IMPACTING THE NERVE EVER SINCE THEY PUT IT IN. DRIVING ME UP THE WALL...
ピッ (BEEP)
!?
YOU'RE ALWAYS IRRITABLE.

WHAT IS IT?
This is Haruka. Is Mamoru-san there!?
haruka online
TEA ROOM
SIREN
...THERE THEY ARE....

BUT SINCE THEY HAVEN'T INVADED YET, THAT MEANS THEY DON'T WANT TO USE FORCE.
EITHER THEY KNOW WHAT KIND OF PLACE "SIREN" IS, OR THEY'RE WAITING FOR MORE MEN...
I'M OFF DUTY AND UNARMED.
IF THEY'RE PACKING, THAT MEANS TROUBLE.
...
I NEVER DETECTED THAT I WAS BEING FOLLOWED ...
...SO THAT WOULD SUGGEST THEIR TARGET IS SOMEONE ELSE WITHIN THE BUILDING ...
IF WE EXCLUDE THE USUAL STAFF, THAT LEAVES ...

...
WELL, IT WOULD ONLY LEAVE THIS WOMAN AS THEIR TARGET.

...UMM...
JUST A MOMENT.
OH?
カツ
KA-CTOKO
カツ
KA

I'VE BEEN HOPING TO SEE YOU, MISS.

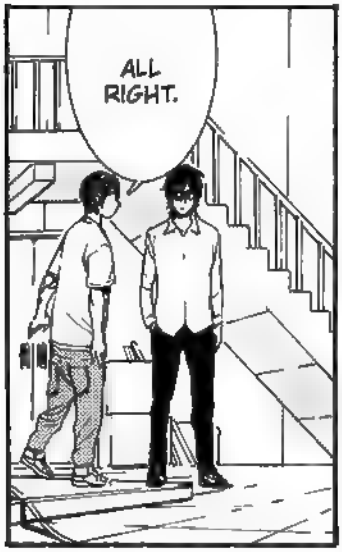
???
...
!?
I THOUGHT I SAW YOUR HAIR POKING OUT FROM THE BOOTH—AND IT TURNS OUT TO BE THE MISSING GIRL.
DO I HAVE THAT RIGHT, HARUKA TOOYAMA-SAN?

YEAH. HE'S A REAL PAIN IN THE ASS.
BUT YOU CRUSHED HIM LAST TIME.
I SEE... IT'S AGENT GENDA.
THE DETEC-TIVE?
Er... um... I...
DON'T BE STUPID— I JUST BARELY WON THAT ONE.
IN FACT, AGENT GENDA'S SWING WAS JUST A HALF-BREATH QUICKER THAN MINE.
IF I HADN'T BEEN GOING FOR THE "BLADE-CHIPPER" FROM THE START, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ME WITH HIS FOREHEAD SPLIT OPEN.

I ONLY WON BECAUSE MY WEAPON WAS "DANZAI," MY BLADE, WHILE HE WAS USING A SIMPLE POLICE BATON.

SO THAT MEANS IT WOULD BE FOOLISH TO JUST WANDER IN THERE.

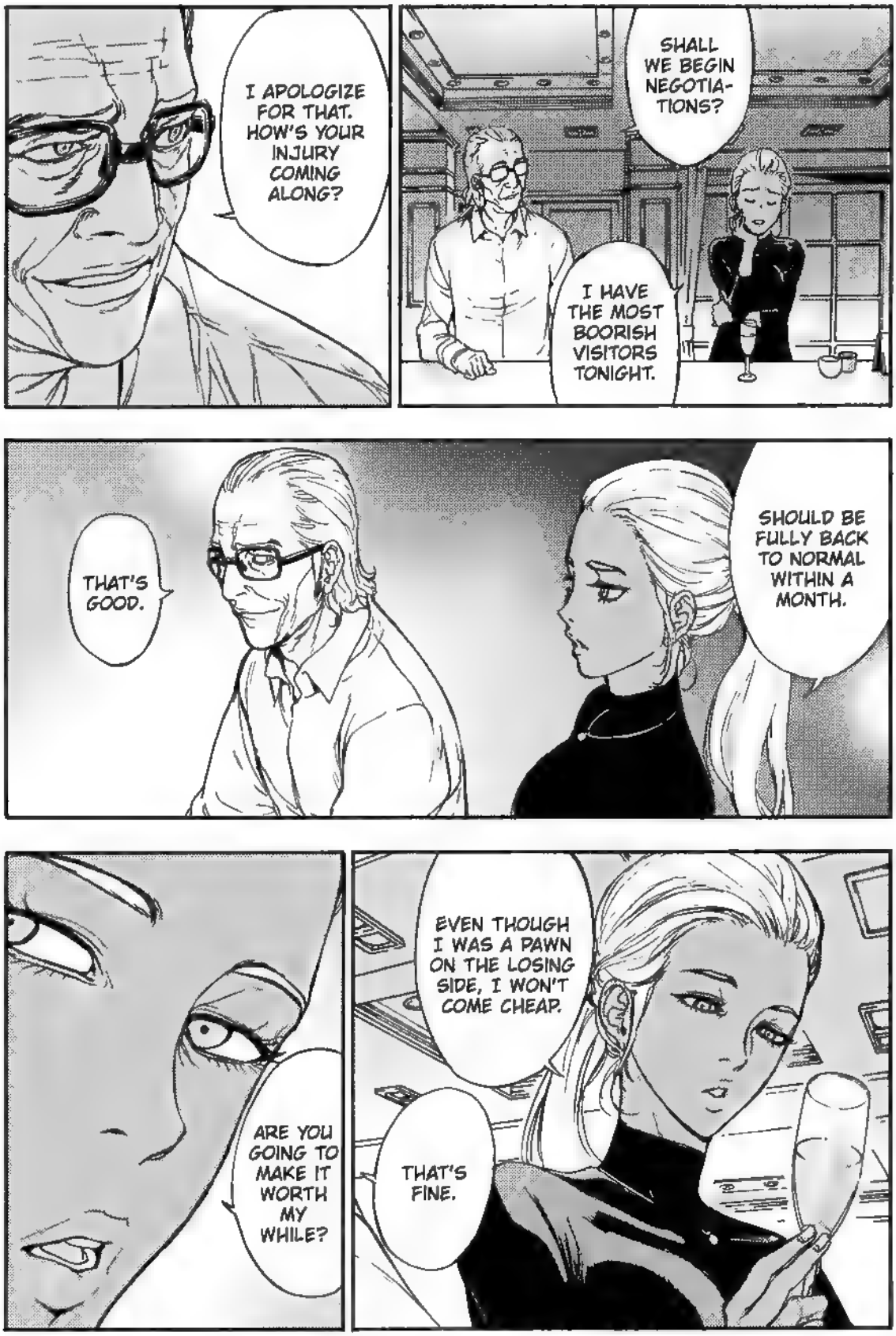
OH... REALLY?
...


ALL RIGHT.

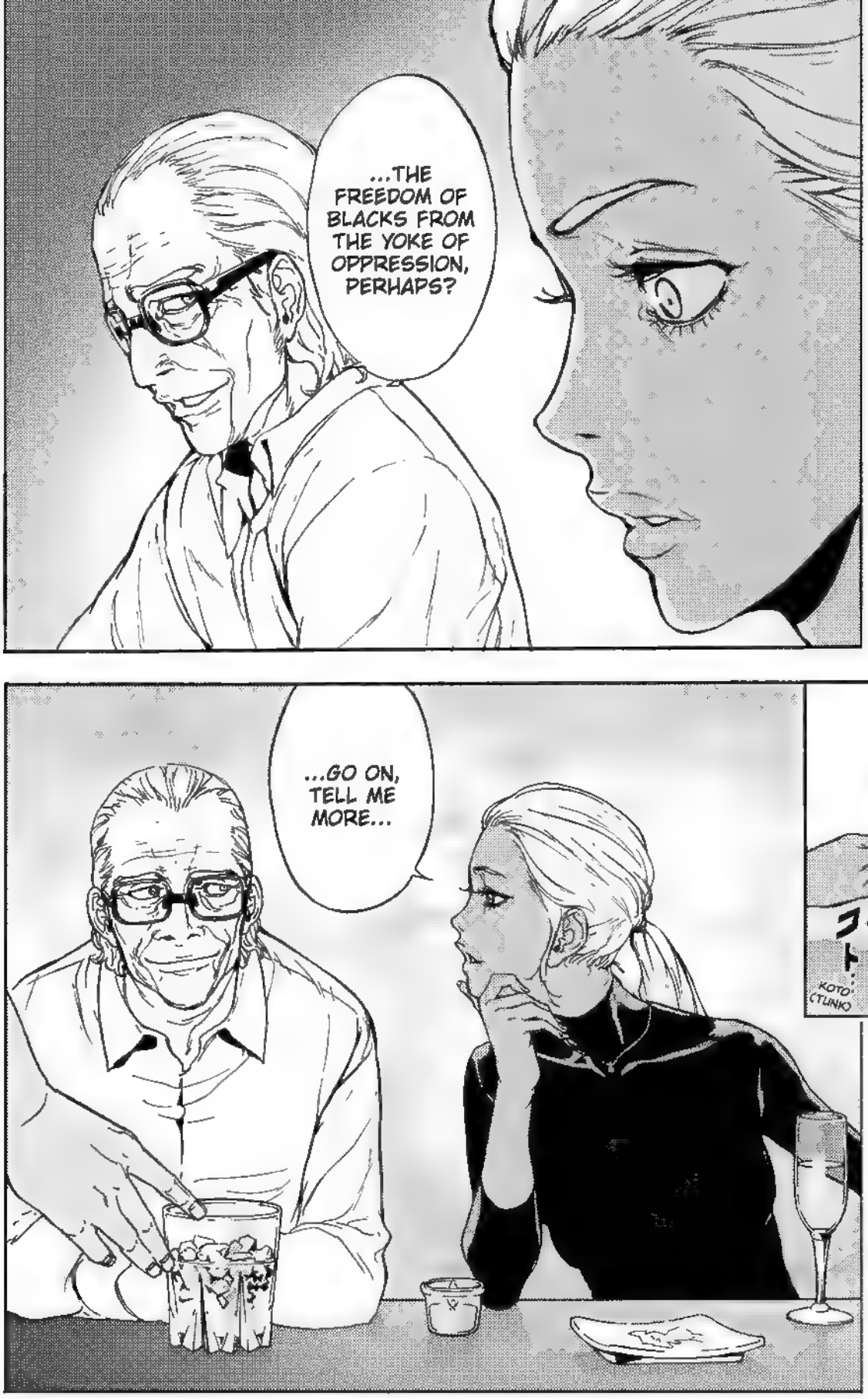
OUGHT TO STAKE OUT A LOCATION NEARBY, JUST IN CASE.
BUT WE CAN'T JUST IGNORE THE FACT THAT THE WOMAN'S BEEN TARGETED...

HOTEL INNO
BOUR-
BON.
CRUSHED
ICE.
HUH?

...
YOU DON'T LOOK HAPPY.
I DON'T APPRECIATE THAT EYESORE STANDING AROUND.
フッ
KO
フッ
KO
OF COURSE.
...


I APOLOGIZE FOR THAT. HOW'S YOUR INJURY COMING ALONG?
SHALL WE BEGIN NEGOTIA-TIONS?
I HAVE THE MOST BOORISH VISITORS TONIGHT.
THAT'S GOOD.
SHOULD BE FULLY BACK TO NORMAL WITHIN A MONTH.
ARE YOU GOING TO MAKE IT WORTH MY WHILE?
EVEN THOUGH I WAS A PAWN ON THE LOSING SIDE, I WON'T COME CHEAP.
THAT'S FINE.

WE CAN'T HAVE ENOUGH HANDS ON DECK FOR THIS ONE.
IT'S LIKELY TO INVOLVE MORE THAN JUST SNIPING ON YOUR END.
HMM?
THE LAST JOB GOT ME TERRIBLY STRESSED OUT.
THERE ARE A NUMBER OF THINGS WE STAND TO GAIN, BUT I SUSPECT WHAT YOU'LL FIND MOST INTRIGUING IS...
AND WHAT'S THE GOAL?
?

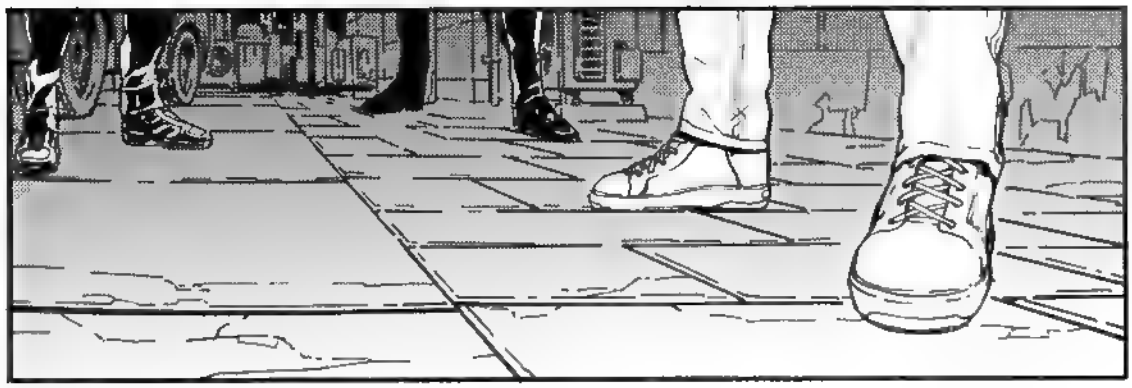

...THE FREEDOM OF BLACKS FROM THE YOKE OF OPPRESSION, PERHAPS?
...GO ON, TELL ME MORE...
コト
KOTO (CLINK)

I HAD A FEELING YOU'D BITE AT THAT ONE.
TEA ROOM
"SIREN"
STAFF ONLY
VODK

Match Images
ピッ
THEY'RE BOTH FORMER MEMBERS OF "BLACK FIRE," THE NOW-BANKRUPT PRIVATE MILITARY CONTRACTOR.
BLACK FIRE
I KNEW IT.

AFTER THE COMPANY'S LICENSE WAS STRIPPED AWAY, THE ENTIRE TEAM WENT FULLY CRIMINAL.
MEMBERS OF THE TEAM THAT INDISCRIMINATELY FIRED INTO A CROWD WHILE ON DUTY IN IRAQ, SLAUGHTERING DOZENS OF INNOCENT CIVILIANS FOR NO REASON.

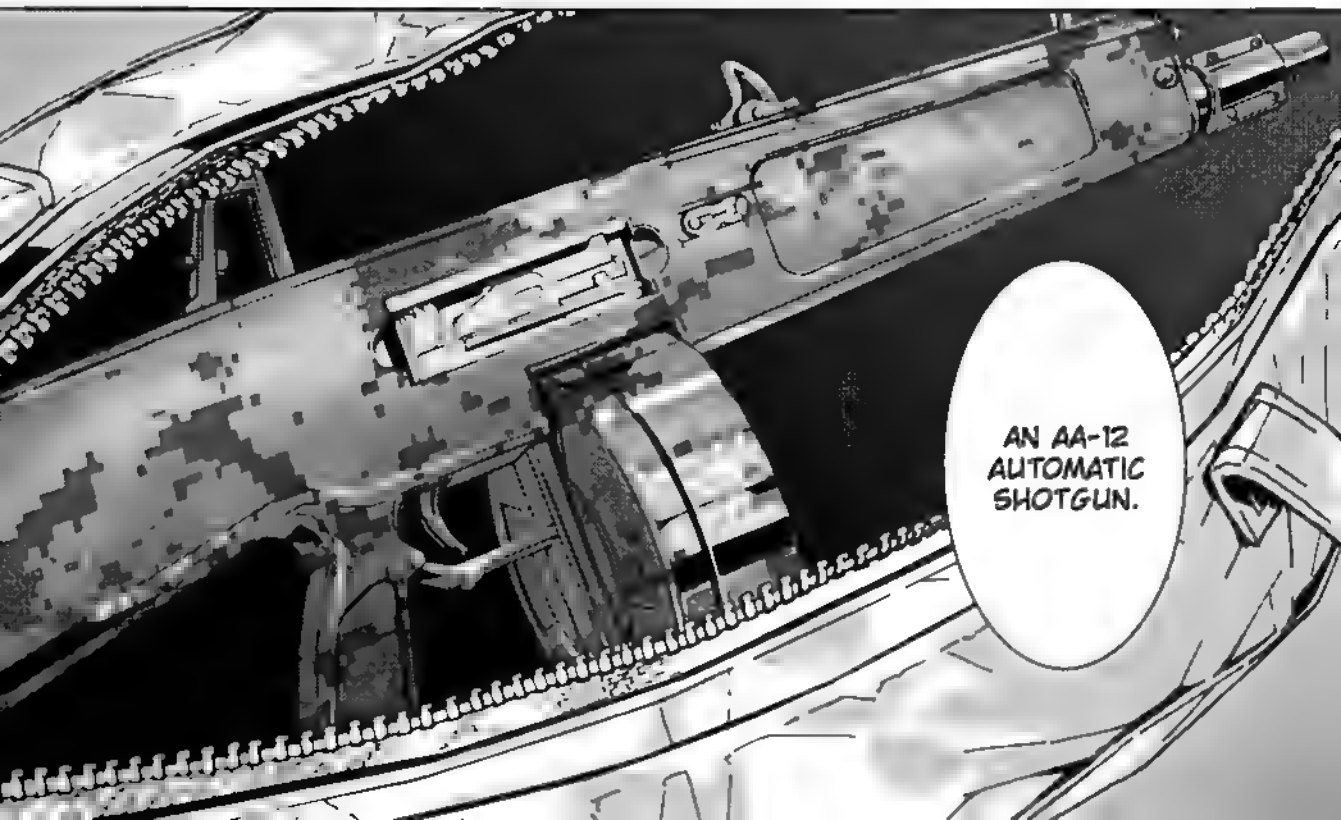
THEY'RE DANGEROUS MEN...



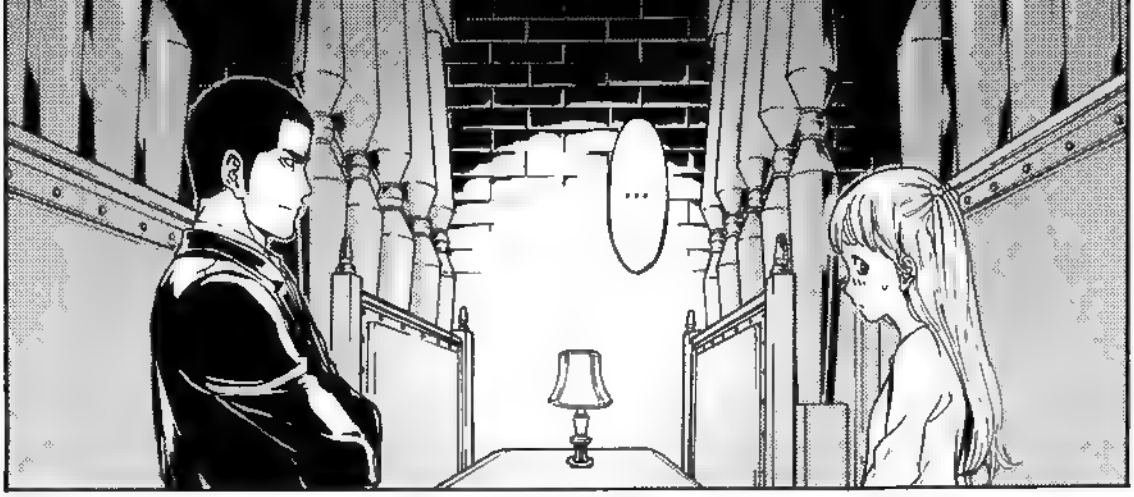
WE CAN TAKE HER AS SOON AS SHE STEPS OUT THE DOOR.
NOTHING FOR THE MOMENT, BUT WE'VE GOT THE PLACE SURROUNDED.
WHAT'S GOING ON?
SO WHAT MAKES THIS WOMAN WORTHWHILE, EH?
WANTED
WE'VE GOT TO GET OUR HANDS ON THAT BEFORE THEY DO.
SHE'S BEEN SNIFFING AROUND ENOUGH THAT OTHER FOLKS LIKE US WILL BE AFTER THE INTEL.
SHE'S COLLECTING INFORMATION ON THE GUY WITH THE HUNDRED-MILLION-DOLLAR BOUNTY ON HIS HEAD.
I DUNNO, IT'S A TRICKY PLACE SHE'S FOUND FOR HERSELF.
WE NEED COLD, HARD CASH TO KEEP THE COMPANY RUNNING NOW THAT WE'RE ESSENTIALLY OUT OF WORK.
SOUNDS LIKE A SOLID PLAN TO ME, CAPTAIN.

BREAK DOWN THE DOOR, AND WE'LL HAVE AEGIS TO DEAL WITH.
AND IF WE TAKE TOO LONG, ANY ONE OF THE OTHER BOUNTY HUNTERS WILL COME ALONG.

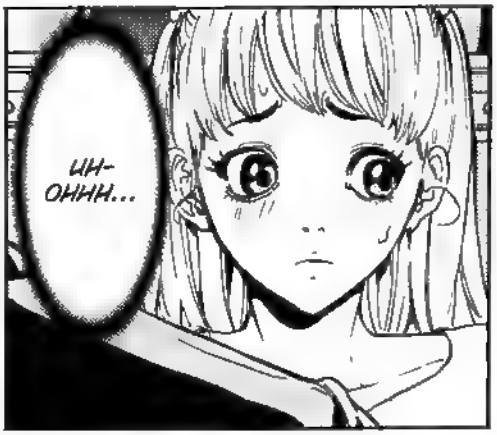
THERE IT IS.
WHAT'S IN THE BAG?


AN AA-12 AUTOMATIC SHOTGUN.

SO WE'RE DOING THIS, THEN?
EVEN THE SAMURAI WILL GET SHREDDED LIKE A RAG DOLL.
A FEW DOZEN SHOTGUN BLASTS WILL TEAR THROUGH HIS PRECIOUS METAL ARM LIKE A HOT KNIFE THROUGH BUTTER.
AEGIS DOESN'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST THIS BABY.
OF COURSE. WE CAN EVEN TEST OUT THE GUN'S LETHALITY ON ANYONE ELSE INSIDE THE BUILDING.
chapter 168


...

IS HE TREATING YOU WELL?


UH- OHHH...

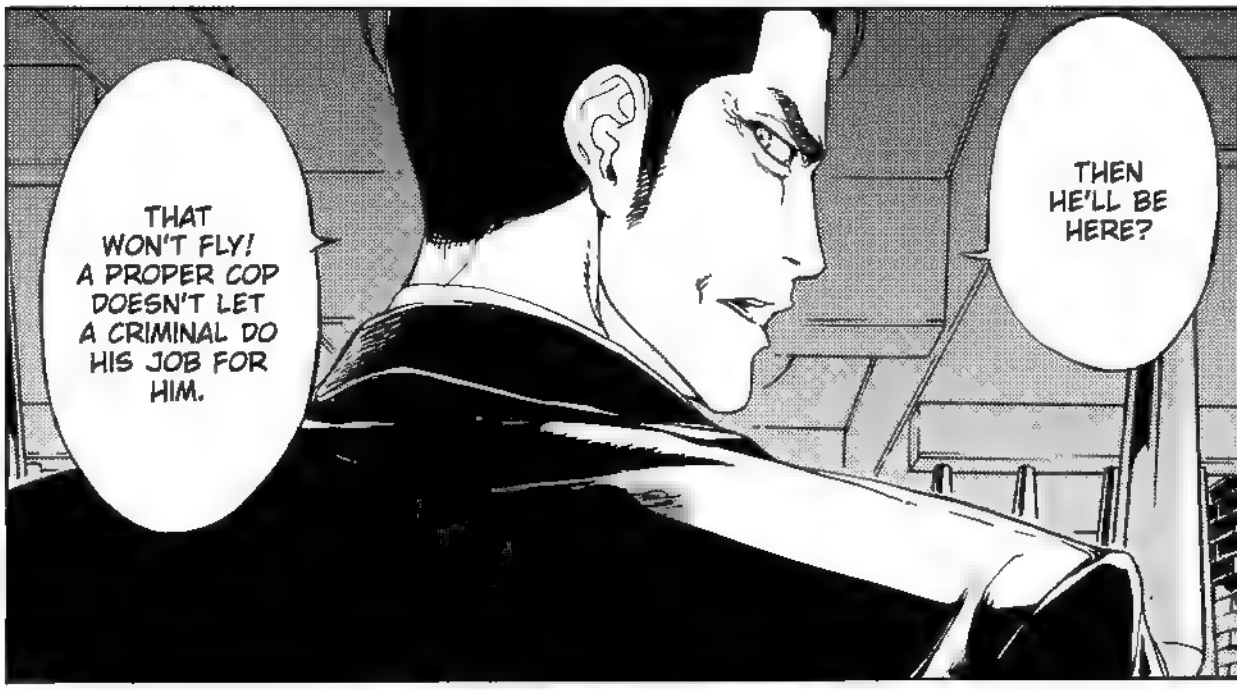
I KNEW HIM, BUT I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND HIM. I'VE BEEN LEARNING ALL KINDS OF THINGS ABOUT HIM TONIGHT.
I ALWAYS THOUGHT HE WAS A COLD BASTARD WHO CARED FOR NOTHING BUT HIS SWORD...

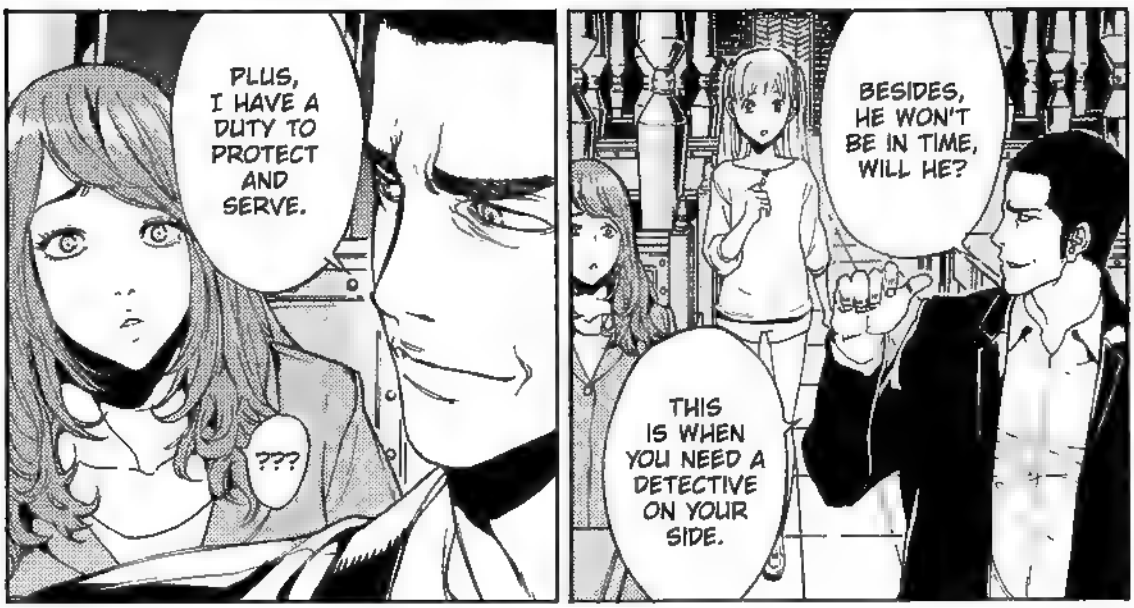
!?

...?
...
...BUT GIVEN THAT HE'S WATCHING OUT FOR YOU, I GUESS THAT'S NOT ENTIRELY THE CASE.
...
DE... TECTIVE ...?
I'M SORRY THAT THE POLICE WEREN'T ANY HELP...
...WITH WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR PARENTS.
AH!

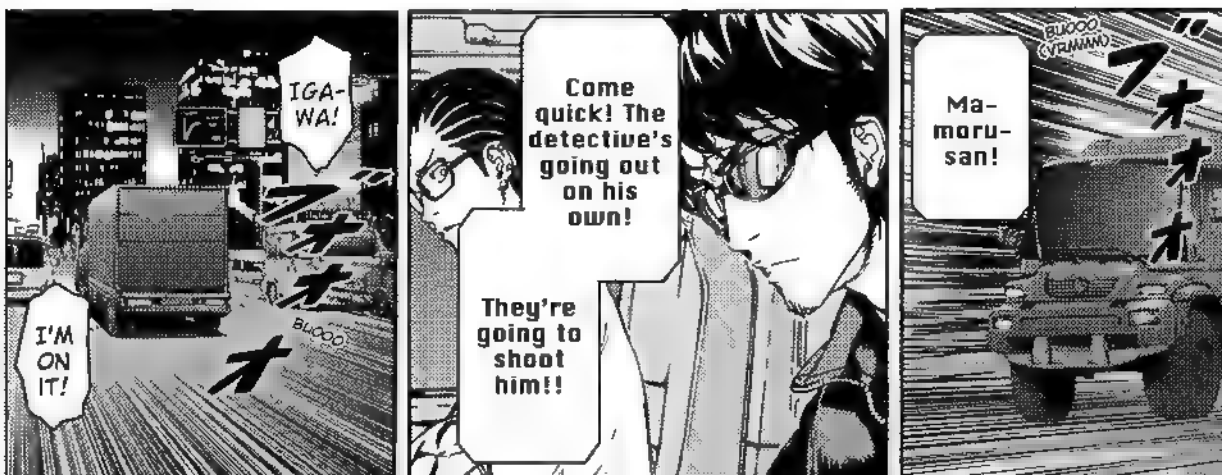
THEY'RE COMING ...
...
THE FUTURE... JUST CHANGED ...
...IF WE CAN'T EVEN EASE A POOR GIRL'S FEARS AT A TIME LIKE THIS.
WE'RE ENTIRELY WORTHLESS AT OUR JOB...
TODAY MIGHT BE MY LAST. I'M GLAD I COULD SHED SOME REGRETS.
BUT I'VE STILL GOT A JOB TO DO.

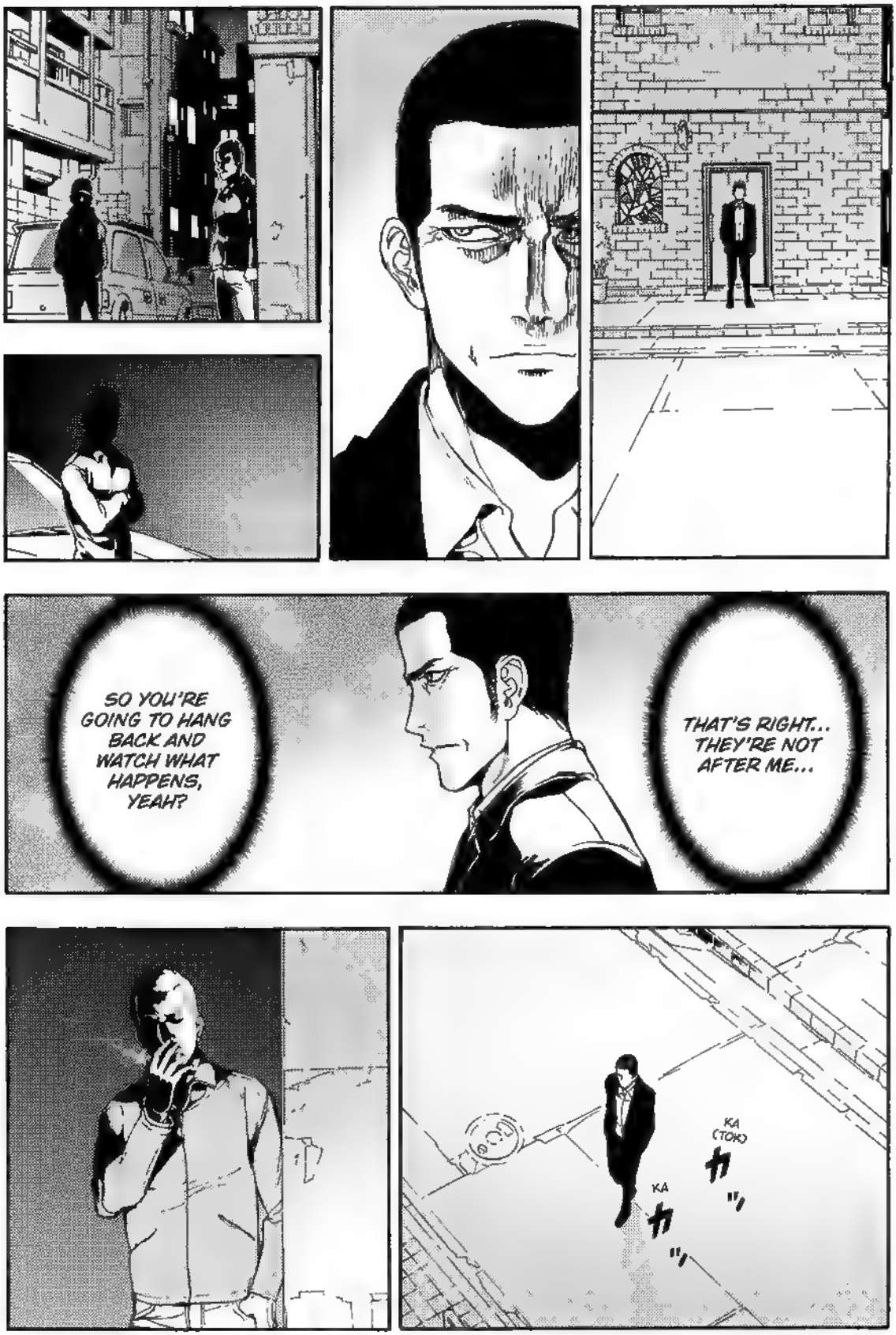
IF YOU JUST WAIT A MINUTE ...
NO, YOU CAN'T GO!!
!?
UM ...
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
...


THAT WON'T FLY! A PROPER COP DOESN'T LET A CRIMINAL DO HIS JOB FOR HIM.
THEN HE'LL BE HERE?


PLUS, I HAVE A DUTY TO PROTECT AND SERVE.
???
BESIDES, HE WON'T BE IN TIME, WILL HE?
THIS IS WHEN YOU NEED A DETECTIVE ON YOUR SIDE.

!?
NO, YOU CAN'T !!


IGA-WA!
I'M ON IT!
BLOOD
Come quick! The detective's going out on his own!
They're going to shoot him!!
BLOOOO (YUMIMO)
Ma-moru-san!


SO YOU'RE GOING TO HANG BACK AND WATCH WHAT HAPPENS, YEAH?
THAT'S RIGHT... THEY'RE NOT AFTER ME...
KA (TOK)
カ
KA
カ

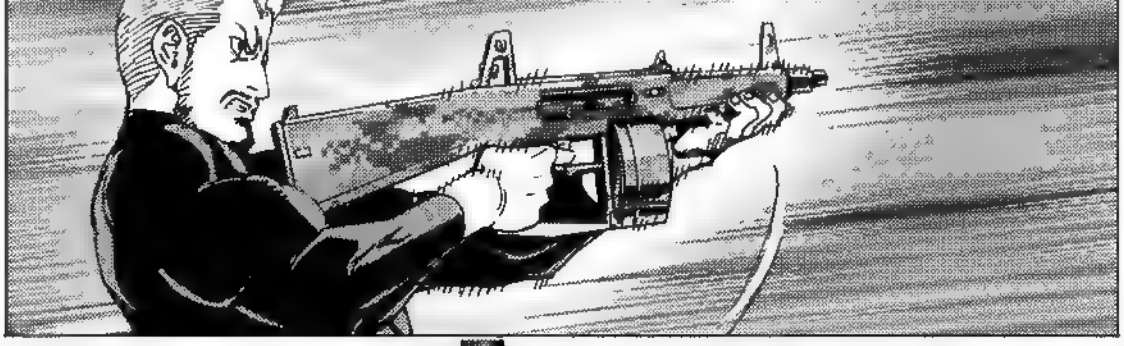
TAKE THE INITIA-TIVE AND CATCH THEM OFF GUARD.
EITHER OF YOU GOT A LIGHT?
OH!?
YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AN ASSHOLE.
GOSO (RUSTLE)
GOSO
NO. FUCK OFF!
FOUND ONE.

?
HYU (SWISH)
DOGA (THWAKK)
WHAT ...?
DOSA (THUMP)

DOGA (WHAM)
CHA (CLICK)
チャッ
STOP RIGHT THERE !!
DOSU (THUD)
ドスッ

GOTTA TAKE THEM DOWN BEFORE BACKUP ARRIVES!
!?
!

YOU CROOKS...



...WILL NEVER STOP ME!!

DADA (DASH)
KIKI!! (SCREECH)
TA (TEK)
BAKI (CRUNCH)
DOKA (THUMP)
GAH!
HNG!
BAKI
GWUH!

WHAT'S GOING ON!?
DA
DA
DA
...AGENT GENDA...
...YO...

YOU'RE A LITTLE LATE.
BUT YOU BROKE THE STALEMATE BETWEEN ME AND THEM. THANKS.

...YOU SOUND LIKE SHIT...
DID THEY GET YOU!?

SURE ...
DOSU (WALLOP)

NOTHING TOO BAD. TAKE CARE OF HIM, WILL YOU?
TON (SHOVE)

DOSA
(THUMP)
...
WHERE IS HE!?
BA
(LEAP)
!?

GFHK!

YO.
LITTLE MISS...
SEEMS LIKE EVERY-ONE'S ALL RIGHT.

AH ...

YOU CAN'T!
...
COME BACK!
WAIT, DETEC-TIVE...
DON'T GO!

AH, DAMN...
YOU LOOK LIKE A WRECK.
DON'T CRY, LITTLE MISS...
I CAN'T HELP IT.
I KNEW THIS WAS MY TIME TO DIE.

RIGHT, HIJIKATA?
MAKABE-SENSEI MUST HAVE KNOWN THE SAME THING.
...IN NOT ALLOWING THERE TO BE A SINGLE VICTIM...
BECAUSE I SUC-CEEDED...
AT LEAST THIS WAY I CAN HOLD MY HEAD HIGH TO TATE.
BY MY STANDARDS, THAT'S PRETTY GOOD.

WAAAAH!!
AAAH!!

AGENT [illegible] DID EXACTLY WHAT HIS JOB DICTATED.
IF ANYTHING HE'S HAPPY ABOUT IT.
DON'T CRY

DOING WHAT YOU HAVE AND SPENDING [illegible] OF YOUR LIFE IN TS PURSUIT
MIGHT MAKE YOU HAPPIER THAN ANYONE ELSE IN THE PLANET

EVEN IF IT MEANS THAT YOU WIND UP DYING IN A DITCH IN THE END.

Until
Death
do us
Part

忌中
IN MOURNING

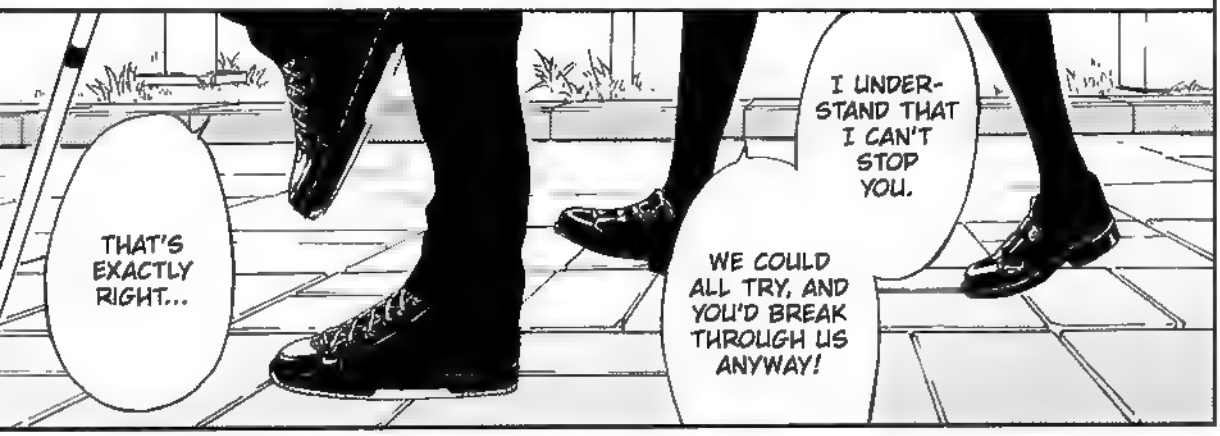
chapter 169

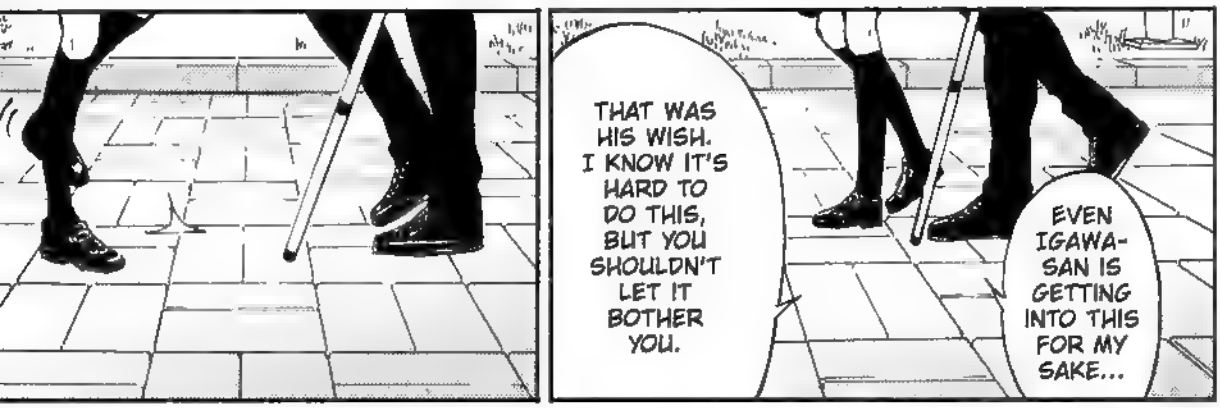
WHY AREN'T YOU DRESSED IN BLACK, HORIKAWA!?
MASUDA-SAN...
AND ON THAT TOPIC, I'VE GOT WORD OF A HOTEL WHERE SOME MEN WHO FIT THE DESCRIPTION ARE HANGING OUT.
FEEL LIKE JOINING ME? I'VE GOT SOME OTHER OFFICERS IN ON THE OPERA-TION.
I SWORE I WOULDN'T SAY MY FAREWELLS TO GENDA-SAN UNTIL I CAUGHT THE GUYS WHO GOT AWAY.
...
...LISTEN TO YOU...

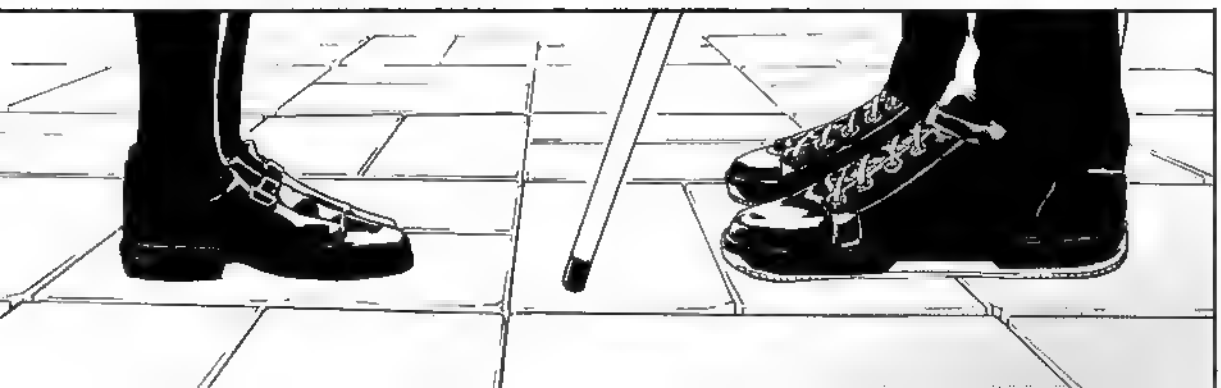
I'LL MEET UP WITH YOU SOON.
ALL RIGHT.
GET SOME REST. WE'RE GOING TO MAKE UP FOR YOUR ABSENCE.
GENDA-SAN...

HMPH... NO USE TRYING TO KEEP SECRETS FROM YOU, I SUPPOSE.
YOU'RE REALLY GOING, AREN'T YOU...?

YOU CAME HERE TODAY TO APOLOGIZE TO AGENT GENDA, RIGHT?
.....


I UNDER-STAND THAT I CAN'T STOP YOU.
WE COULD ALL TRY, AND YOU'D BREAK THROUGH US ANYWAY!
THAT'S EXACTLY RIGHT...


THAT WAS HIS WISH. I KNOW IT'S HARD TO DO THIS, BUT YOU SHOULDN'T LET IT BOTHER YOU.
EVEN IGAWA-SAN IS GETTING INTO THIS FOR MY SAKE...



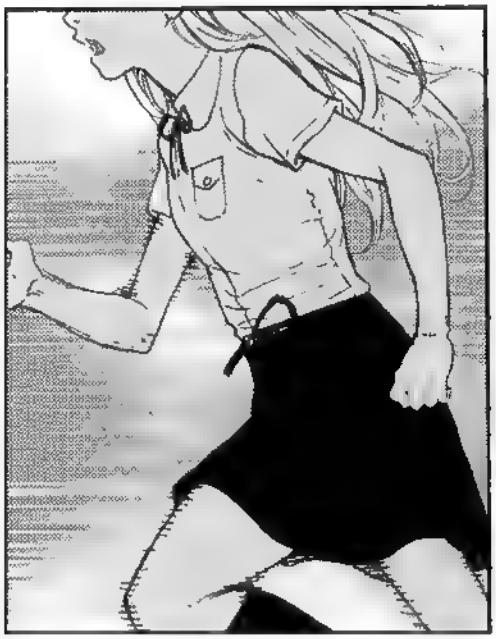
!?

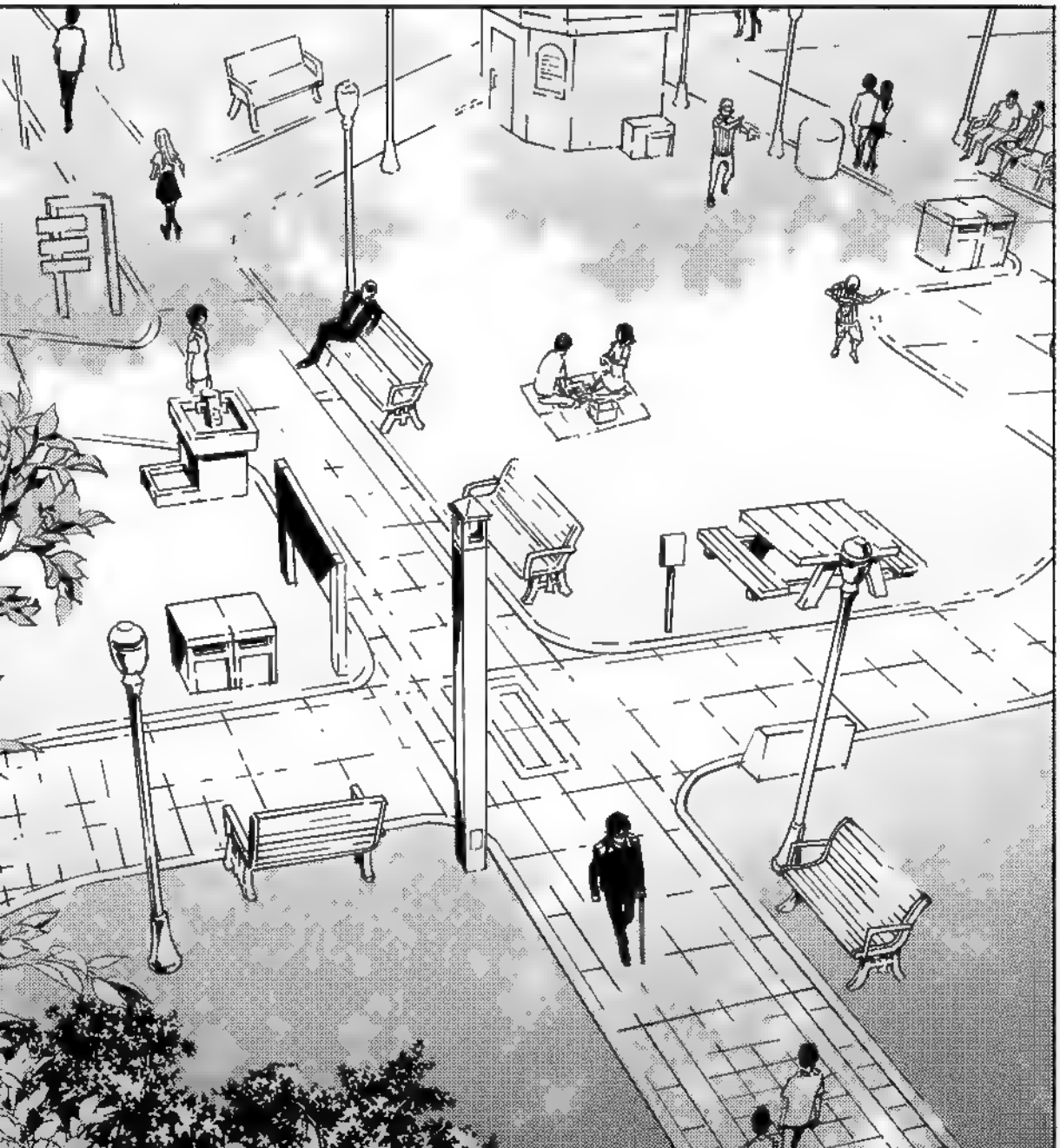
HEY... WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

THEN I'LL BE THE NEXT ONE TO CHALLENGE YOU, MAMORU HIJIKATA!!
AND I KNOW I CAN WIN!!

TA
(TEK)

...I'LL BE DAMNED...
AND WHAT DOES SHE MEAN BY "WIN"?

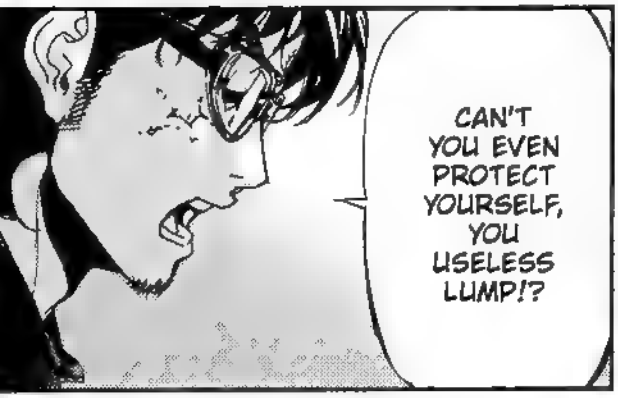




BA
(FWAP)
HNK
!?
!?

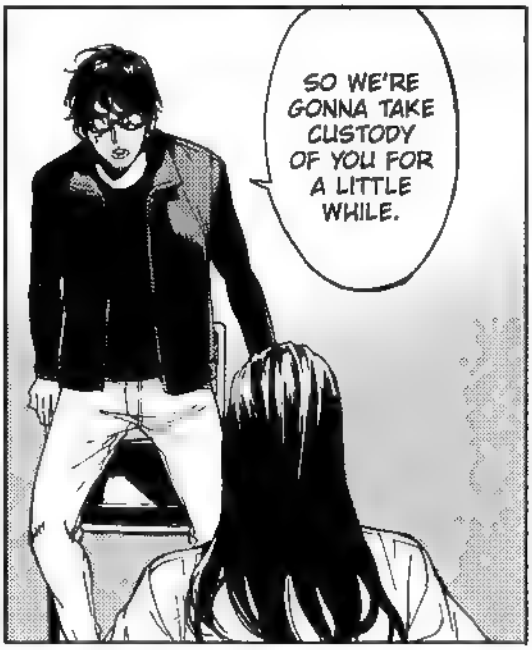
YOU IDIOT!
WH-WHO ARE YOU!?

I LET YOU WALK ON PURPOSE.
BUT GETTING CAUGHT JUST RUINS OUR ENTIRE PLAN!


CAN'T YOU EVEN PROTECT YOURSELF, YOU USELESS LUMP!?

WHA...?
WH-WH-WH-WHA...?

DON'T ASSUME YOU'LL HAVE ANY FREEDOM FOR NOW!!

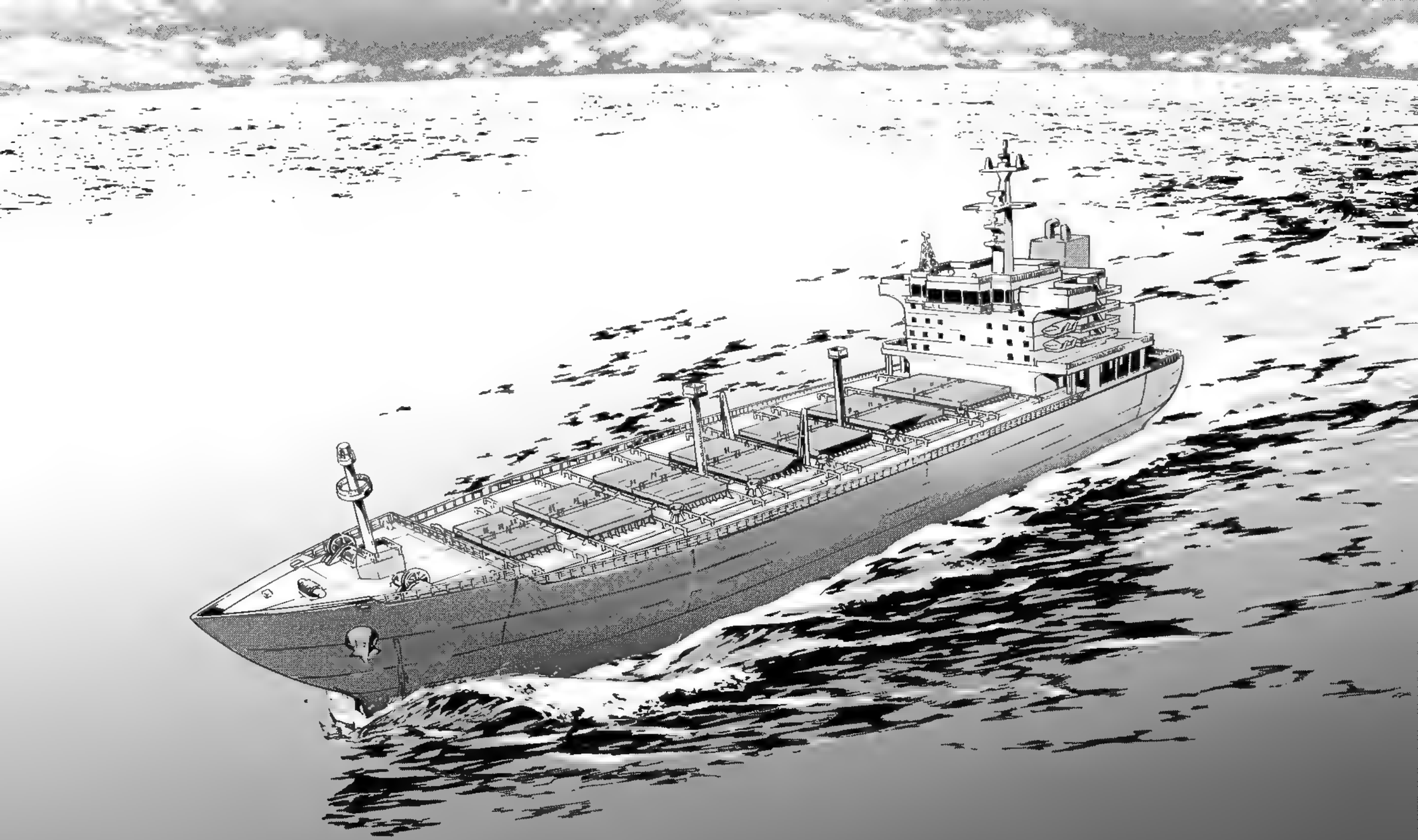

SO WE'RE GONNA TAKE CUSTODY OF YOU FOR A LITTLE WHILE.

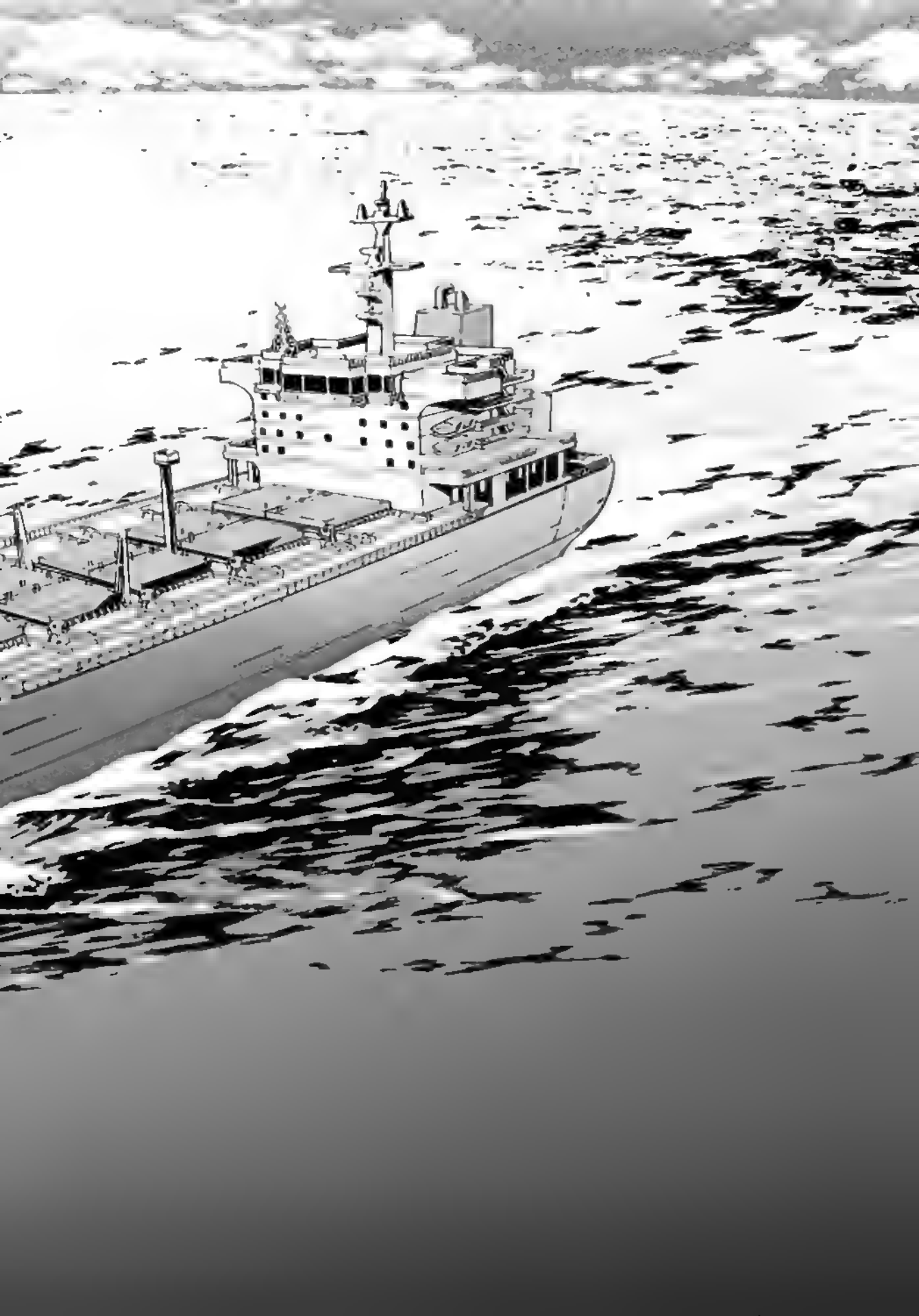
SORRY. WE'RE WORKIN' FOR HIM NOW.
WHAT !?

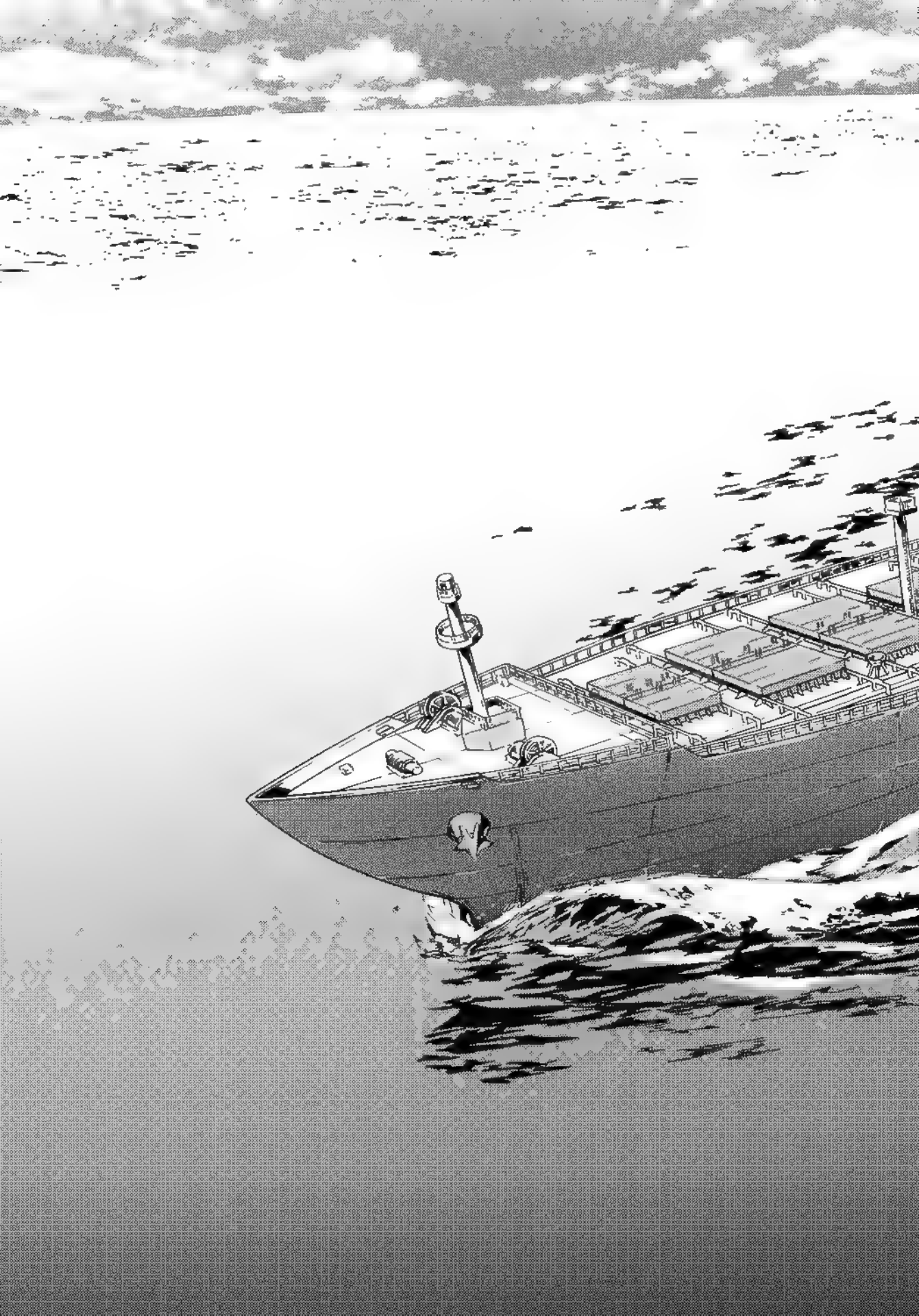
AREN'T YOU ALL GENIE'S MEN!?
WHY ARE YOU LETTING HIM WALK AROUND!?

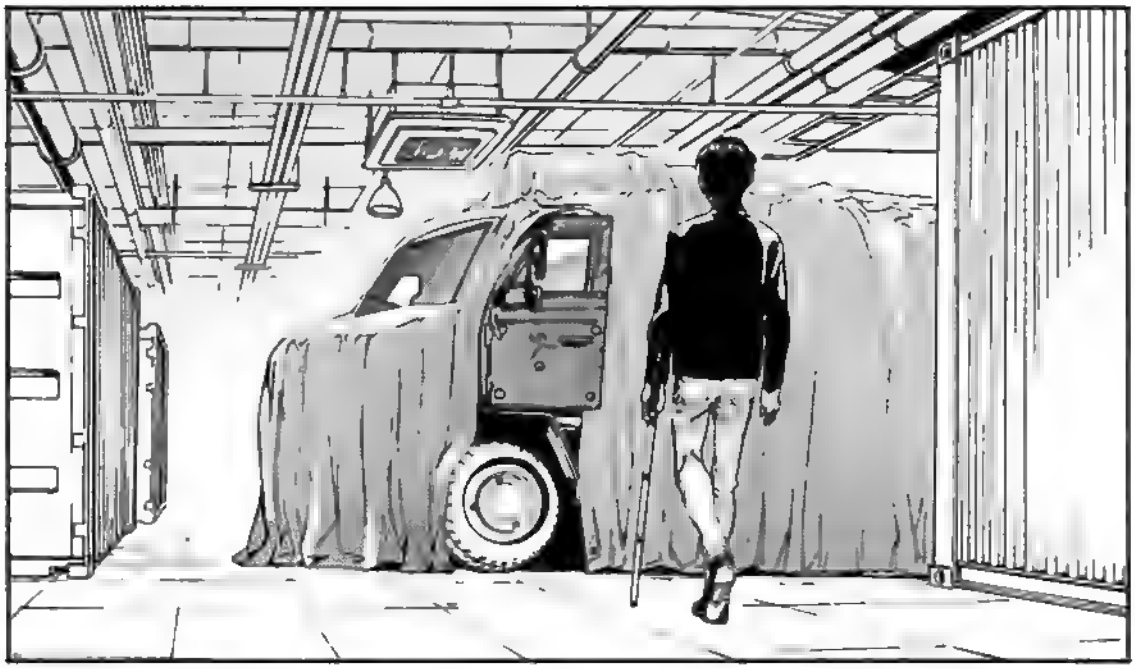
WE WERE UNDER NO OBLIGATION TO OBEY YOUR ORDERS TO BEGIN WITH.
SO LET'S ALL PLAY NICE AND DO WHAT HE SAYS, YEAH?

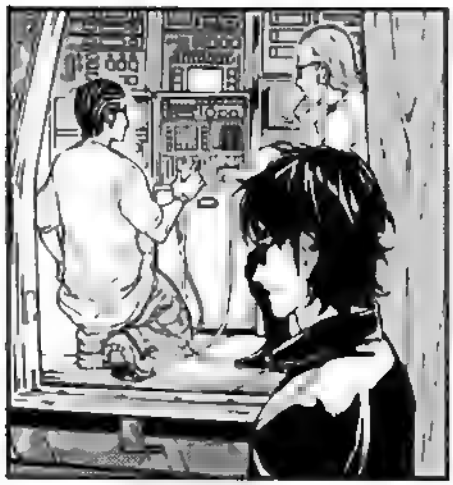
LET'S ESCORT MR. TURUS DOWN TO THE HOLD.
... YOU ...
YOU SHAME-LESS...
...
HEH!
...THE HOLD!?

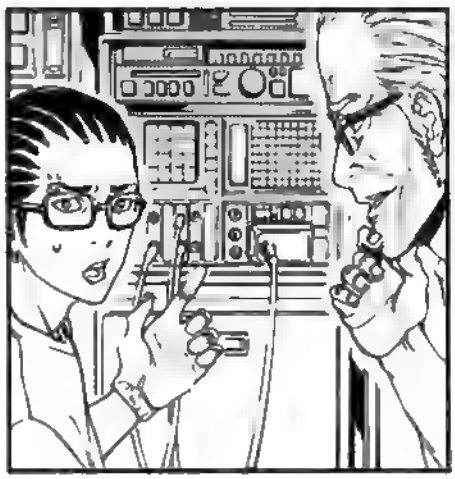


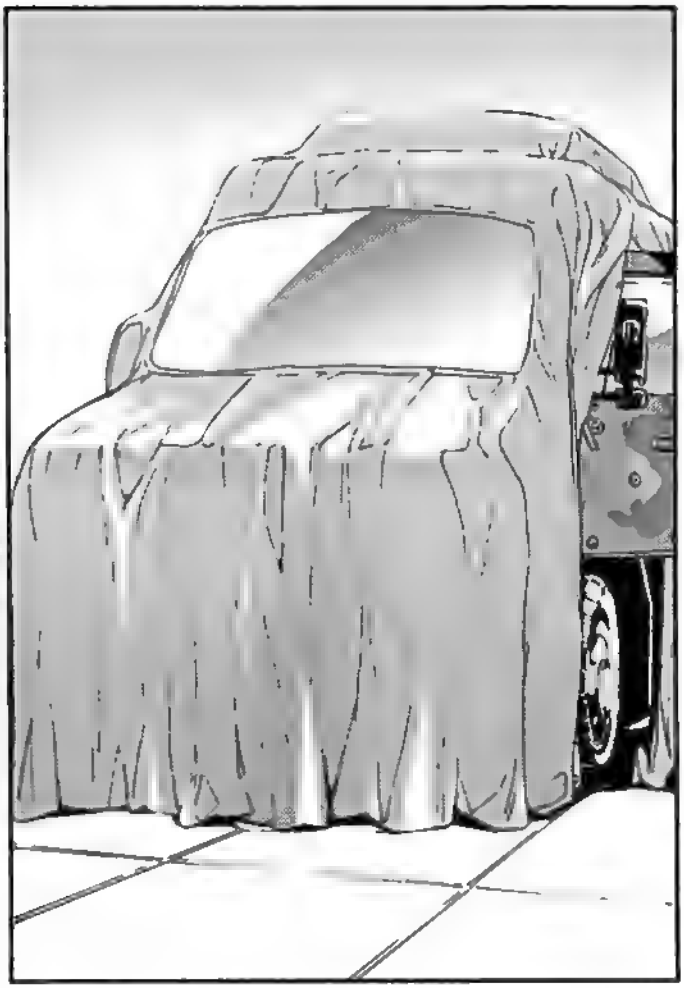








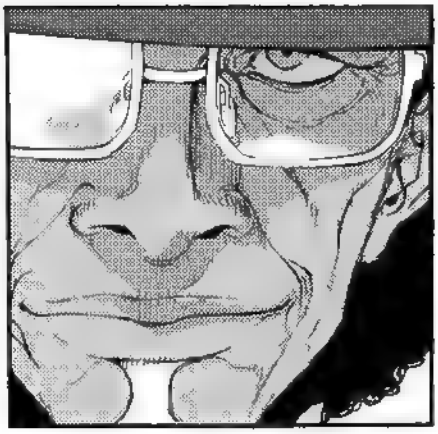




GACHA (CHUNK)
ガチャ
SORRY FOR THE SHORT NOTICE, BUT YOU'RE WORKING FOR US NOW.
...

THIS IS ON GENIE'S ORDERS.

YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO MAKE SURE I DON'T BETRAY YOU.
BUT TECHNICALLY, YOU CAN THINK OF YOURSELVES AS MY OVER-SEERS.

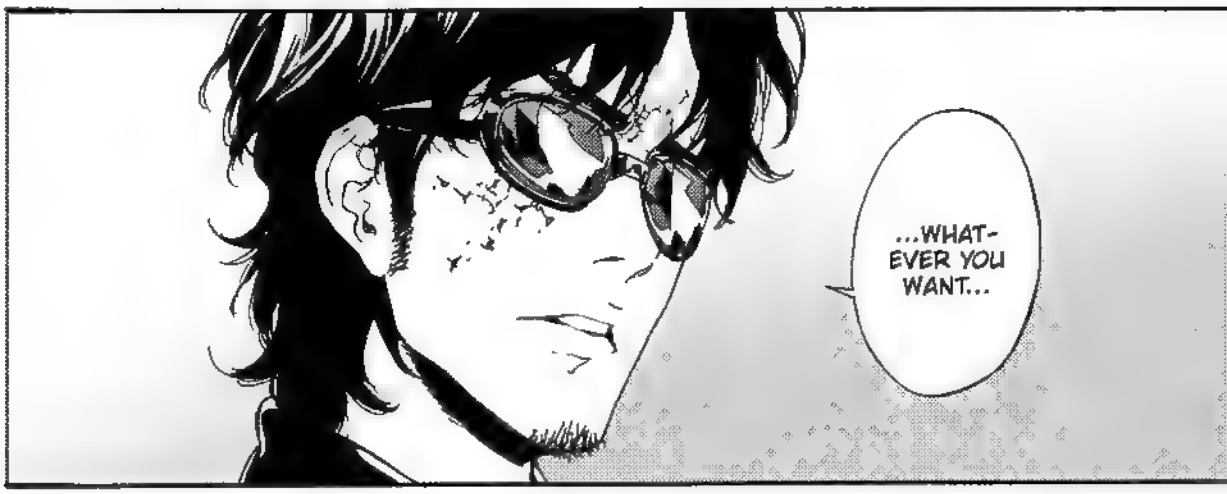


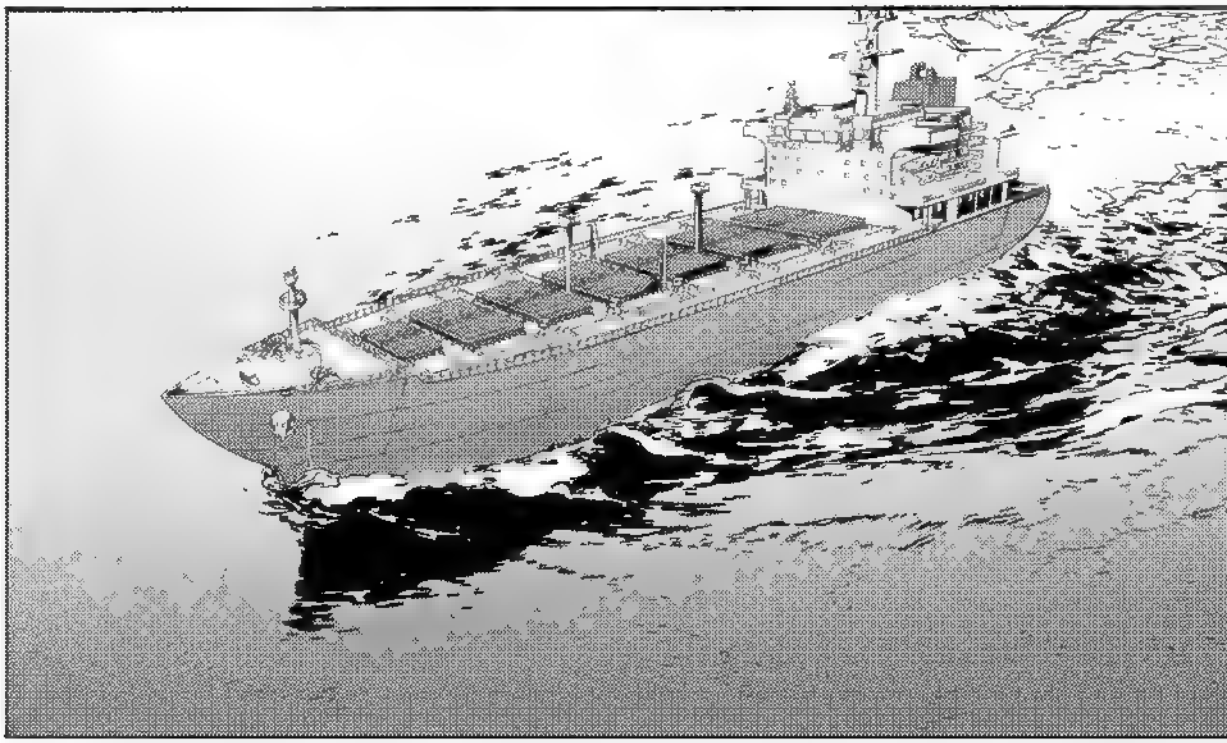
...

AND SINCE YOU'RE TAGGING ALONG, YOU'VE GOT TO MAKE YOURSELF USEFUL TOO.
I SEE.
SO WE'RE SUPPOSED TO HEAL UP TO GET BACK IN ACTION THROUGH THIS LONG VOYAGE?
...THAT'S EXACTLY RIGHT...
YEAH, I KNOW.

I WOULD HAVE JUST WASTED AWAY IF I'D BEEN STUCK IN PRISON THIS WHOLE TIME.
DON'T WANNA ACTUALLY TURN INTO A REAL "DONICHI."
NOTHIN', JUST A PRIVATE JOKE.
WHAT?
I DUNNO WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO YOU, BUT YOU'VE GOT MY ASSISTANCE FOR SAVING ME.
I CAN BE USEFUL.

GOT IT, BOSS?
BUT AS SOON AS WE'RE DONE, I'M TAKIN' OFF.

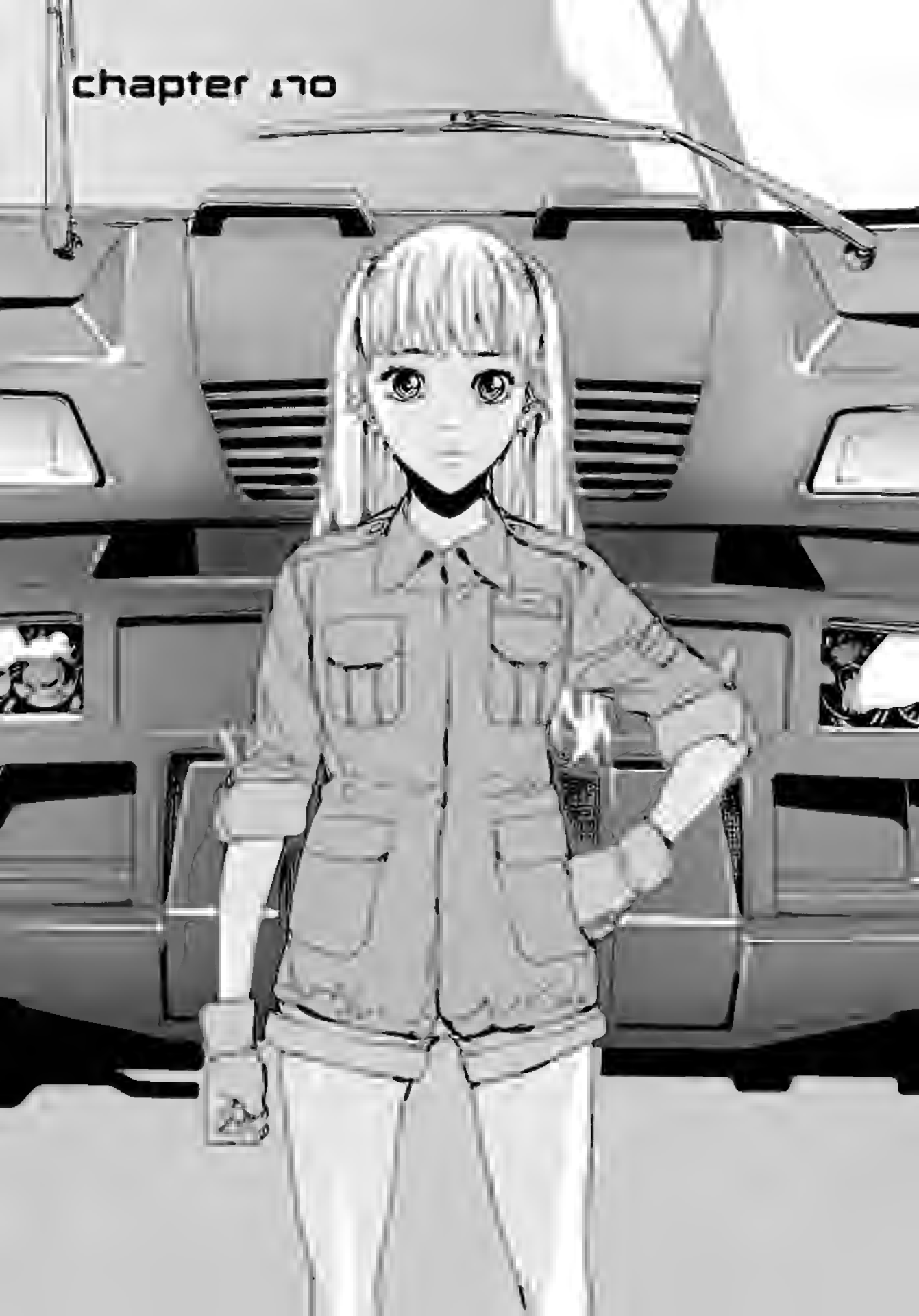

...WHAT-EVER YOU WANT...



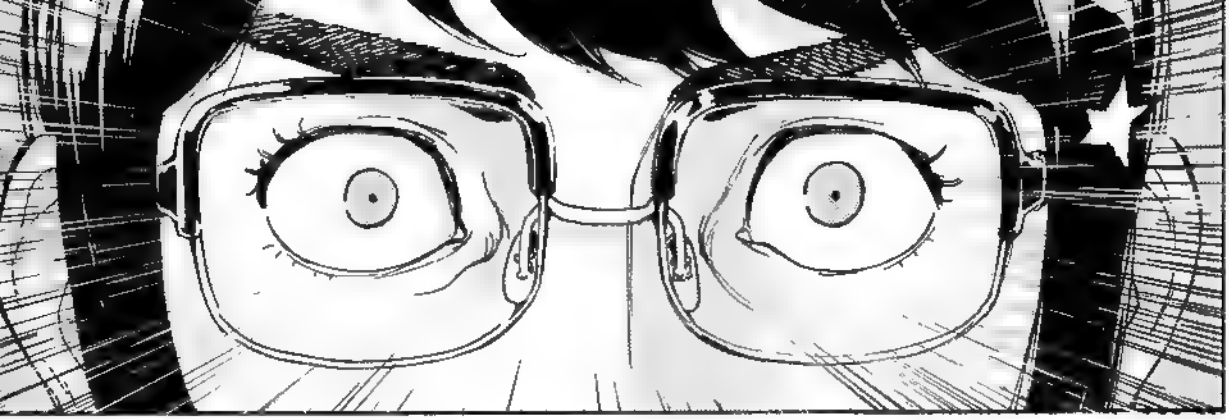
A SHORT WHILE AGO—
...SENJI-SAN...
I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU.

THE BIG GUY TOLD ME TO HANDLE THE REST.
SO FROM THIS POINT ON, I'LL BE YOUR BODYGUARD, LITTLE MISS.
...
I SUPPOSE NOTHING I SAY WILL CHANGE YOUR MIND.
BUT...
PLEASE DON'T TURN ME DOWN. I'M ONLY HERE BECAUSE I COULDN'T BE THERE.
AND THERE'S NOTHING LEFT FOR ME ASIDE FROM THIS ROLE.
I'LL BE AT YOUR SIDE, ALIVE OR DEAD, UNTIL HE COMES BACK.

chapter 170

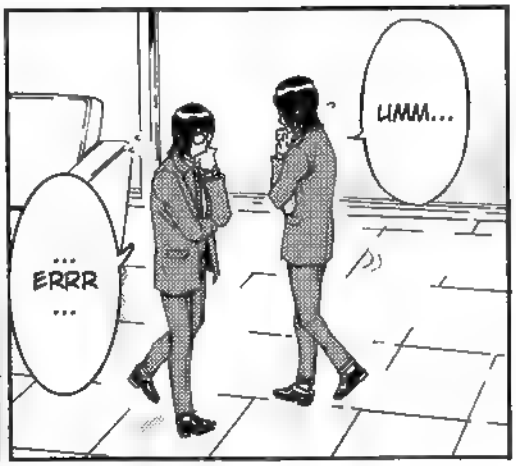


I SUPPOSE WE MUST CONDITION-ALLY ACCEPT.
Master, I received two requests for leave via the Net thirty seconds ago.
However, I have now identified it as crucial information and will therefore reveal it to you.
It is extremely private information, and therefore I was planning to process it by myself, as long as the circum-stances allowed.
There is more information I have not relayed to you.

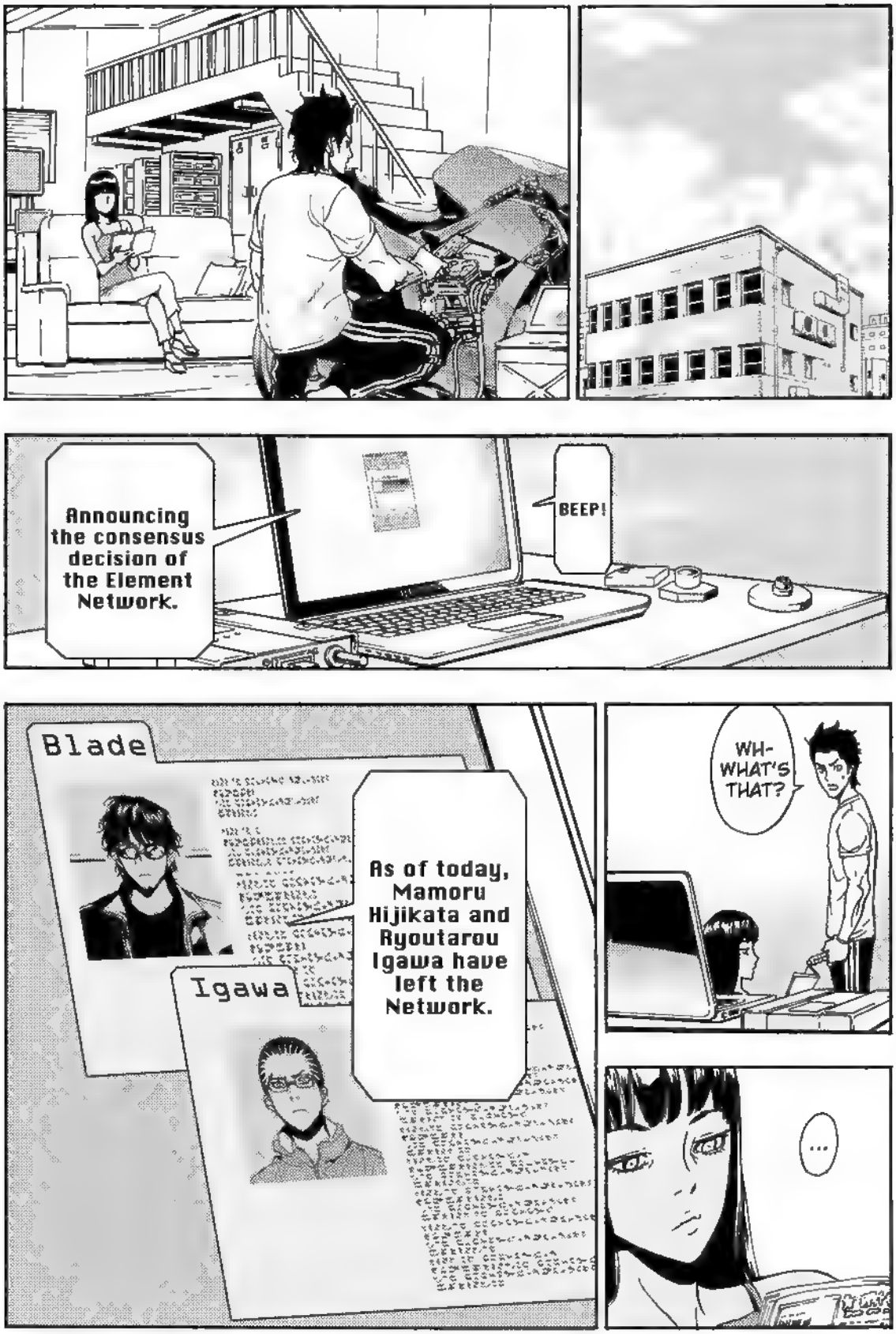


Yes.
MAMORU HIJIKATA AND HARUKA TOOYAMA ARE FUTURE HUSBAND AND WIFE???

BORI (SCRATCH)
BORI
GEEZ, THIS IS A MESS!

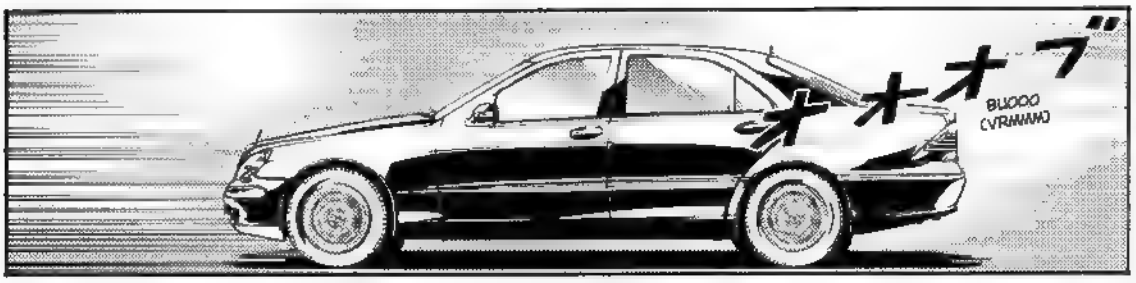

UMM...
... ERRR ...

Master, those are not the words of a 24-year-old adult.
YES, I'M SORRY.
MY ESTIMATED MENTAL AGE IS STILL ELEVEN. MY MIND HASN'T CHANGED FROM THE DAY MY MOTHER WAS KILLED.
I ONLY PRETEND TO ACT OLDER AS MY BODY AGES.
...
I don't see it that way, Master.
I NEED TO THINK OF A WAY TO PENALIZE HIM.
SPARKY, HARUKA TOOYAMA HERSELF WOULD NOT BE ENOUGH TO RESTRAIN HIM.
Yes, Master.

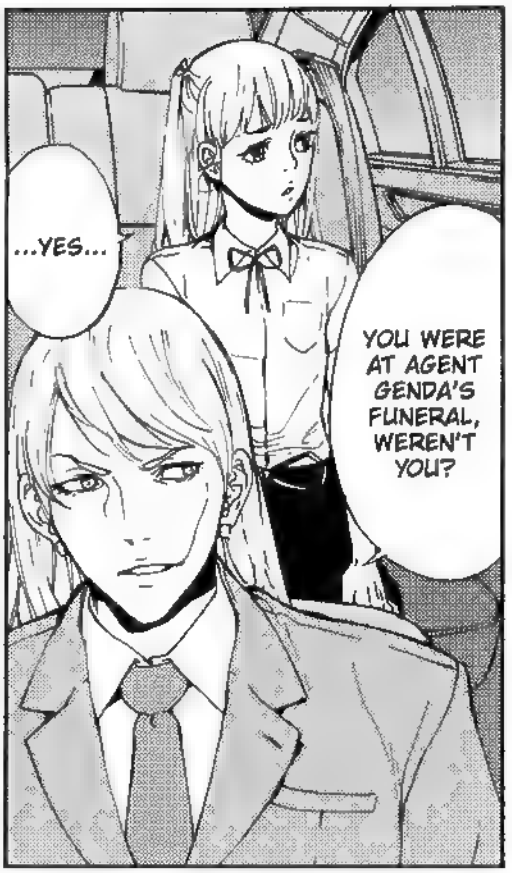

Announcing the consensus decision of the Element Network.
BEEP!
Blade
Igawa
As of today, Mamoru Hijikata and Ryoutarou Igawa have left the Network.
WH-WHAT'S THAT?
...

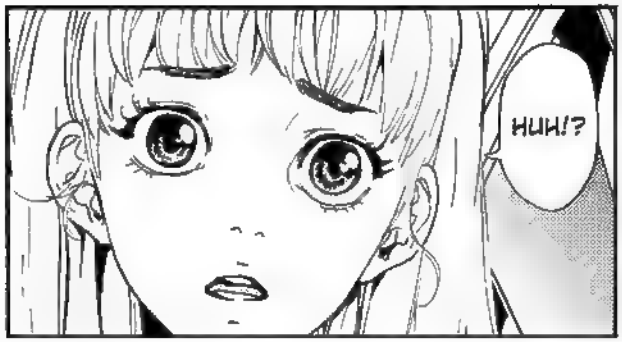
Therefore, Team "Blade" is no longer functional ...
...and is hereby reassigned into Team "Bucephalus."
HUH!?
IT MEANS TEAM "BLADE" IS NOW DEFUNCT.
IT'S LOST ITS ACTIVE MEMBERS AND OPERATOR.
An official announcement will be made upon Haruka Tooyama's return.
WHAT DOES THIS MEAN!?

SO HARUKA'S ON OUR TEAM NOW?
I SUPPOSE THAT'S RIGHT.


ブオオオ
BUOOO (VRMMM)

IT MUST HAVE GIVEN HIM SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT.
YOUR PAL SPED UP THE PLAN RIGHT AFTER THE COP DIED IN THE LINE OF DUTY.


...YES...
YOU WERE AT AGENT GENDA'S FUNERAL, WEREN'T YOU?


HUH!?

...
IT WASN'T SUPPOSED TO GO INTO EFFECT FOR ANOTHER MONTH.
PERHAPS IT WAS...
YOU GOT TO WITNESS AGENT GENDA AT HIS BEST.

BUT PEOPLE DIE WHEN IT'S TIME TO DIE, AND THERE'S NO MEANING TO IT.
THE ONLY THING THAT MAKES IT MEANINGFUL IS THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE ON AFTER THAT!
...
...MAMORU-SAN...

KIKI (SCREECH)
!?
BUOOO (VRUMM)
NICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN.
HUH? IT'S YOU...
HEY! HEY!
GACHA (CLICK)
NO OUT-SIDERS IN HERE, YOU KNOW THAT!!
OH, WE HAVE A GUEST?
IS HE A NEW MEMBER?
I'M SORRY FOR ACTING WITHOUT PERMISSION.

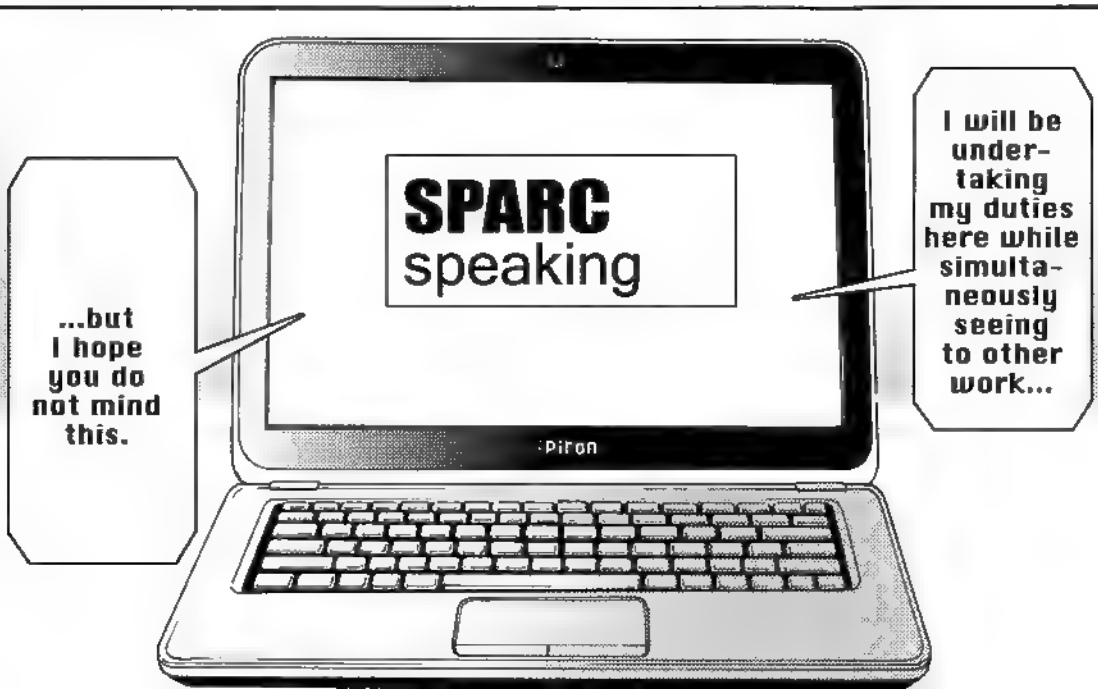
HMM... I LIKE THE WAY HE LOOKS...
HOW SO!?
NO, HE'S A YAKUZA AND AN OUTSIDER!
SENJI TAMAGAWA, FORMER YAKUZA. A PLEASURE.
NOT HIS FACE! I MEAN HIS EXPERIENCE.
A GOOD WOMAN UNDERSTANDS THESE THINGS.
PARDON THE INTER-RUPTION.

PYRO-SAN.
LOTS OF VISITORS TODAY.
WE'VE GOT NOTICE OF REASSIGN-MENT.
コン
KON (SND)
KON
コン
AS OF TODAY, "BUCEPHALUS" IS NO MORE. ITS MEMBERS ARE IN A NEW TEAM.
THIS AREA WILL REVERT TO THE PURVIEW OF TEAM "ALCBANE," THE FORMER GROUP IN CHARGE.
WHAT!? WHY DIDN'T ANYONE TELL US THIS STUFF!?

OUR NEW GROUP, THE INTER-NATIONAL STRIKE TEAM "UDDUP"...
...IS PLACED UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF HARUKA TOOYAMA.
YES, SIR!
ONE OF THE THREE NEW MEMBERS IS...

...THIS TALENTED FELLOW, CODE-NAMED "SHOT."
I REMEMBER SHOT—HE WAS THE ELITE SOLDIER IN CHARGE OF SOUTH AFRICA.

NEXT IS "ELAN."
ELAN'S ON THE WAY OVER AS WE SPEAK.
AS OF TODAY, I'M UNDER YOUR COMMAND.
N-NICE TO MEET YOU.
HUH !?
OUR OPERATOR.
AND LASTLY, "SPARC."

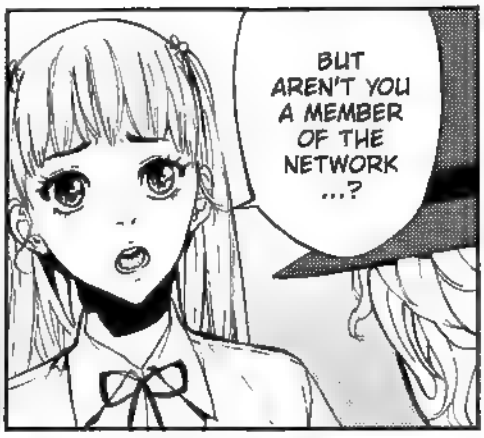

SPARC
speaking
...but I hope you do not mind this.
I will be under-taking my duties here while simulta-neously seeing to other work...

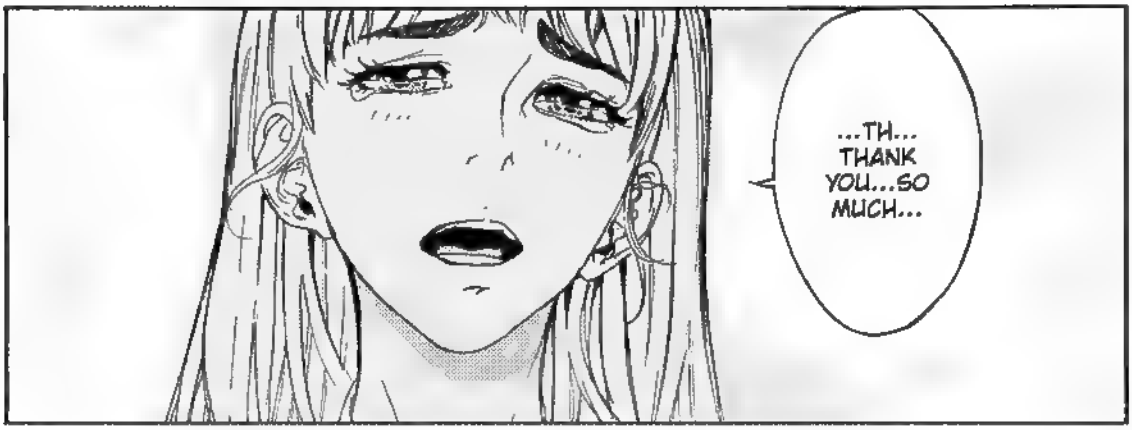
REQUEST MORE, AND WE'LL HAVE OTHER AGENTS READY TO JOIN.
IF YOU NEED MORE MEMBERS, THAT WILL BE AT THE LEADER'S DISCRETION.
???
...
SU (SHH)
スッ
...AND WHAT CAN YOU DO?

I'M THE YOUNG LADY'S BULLET SHIELD.
SOUNDS GOOD...I'M SURE YOU'LL LIVE UP TO THE TASK.
NICE ATTI-TUDE.
A PLEASURE TO BE ON THE TEAM.

TAKE ME WITH YOU.
I CAN BE OF GREAT HELP TO YOU.

THE BOSS IS BACK IN ACTION, SO I'M OUT OF A POSITION AS OF TODAY.
AND I WAS JUST THINKING OF TAKING A VACATION TO AFRICA ANYWAY.


BUT AREN'T YOU A MEMBER OF THE NETWORK ...?


...TH... THANK YOU...SO MUCH...

I'M THE ACE OF THE TEAM! I PULL MY OWN WEIGHT!
DAAH!! SHUT UP ALREADY !!
SO YOU'D BETTER KEEP UP, OR GET LEFT IN THE DUST.
GEEZ, EVERY-ONE'S GETTING INVOLVED ...
OUR DUTY IS TO INFILTRATE DUHANA AND TRACK DOWN A CRIMINAL.
THE TARGET— "BLADE."
!?

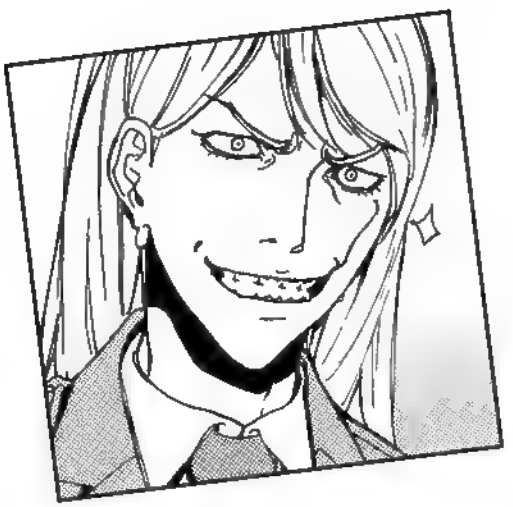
...WE WILL BE IN A JOINT TRAINING PERIOD TO ENSURE THE GROUP WORKS AS A TEAM.

FOR THE NEXT MONTH AND CHANGE, AS BLADE'S SHIP HEADS TO ITS DESTINATION ...

FOR THE NEXT MONTH AND CHANGE, AS BLADE'S SHIP HEADS TO ITS DESTINATION ...

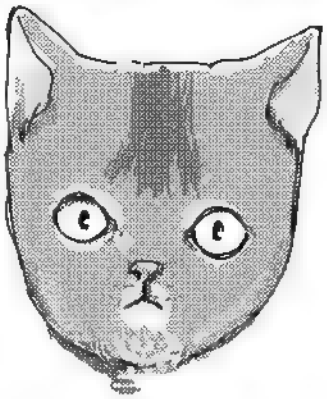
...WE WILL BE IN A JOINT TRAINING PERIOD TO ENSURE THE GROUP WORKS AS A TEAM.

...
THIS IS MY TEAM...
I WON'T LET ANY OF THEM DIE...



Until
Death
do us
Part

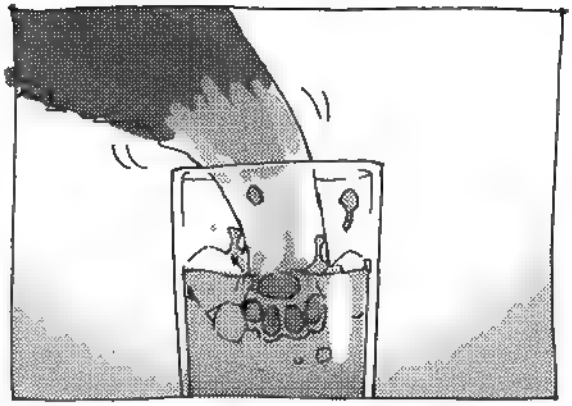
OMAKE PAGE

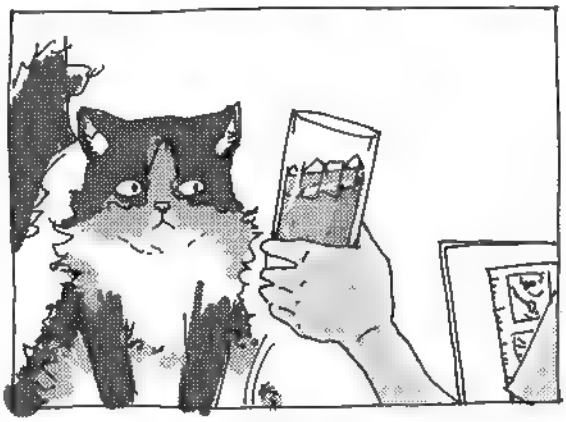


Carlos

'N'

Catherine





THIS REGAL PROFILE... HER ROYAL MAJESTY, CATHERINE L'PREMIERE.
SHE'S GOR-GEOUS!
EEEK!
HM?
WHAT'S UP, CARLOS?
BUT SHE IS NO ORDINARY CAT...
SHE SMELLS LIKE THAT "CALPIS" DRINK.
MEOWW!
* BY THE WAY, I LOVE THE SMELL OF HER PAWS...
GROOM MY HAIR, MASTER.
SHE DOESN'T EVEN TRY TO GROOM HER OWN FUR LIKE A NORMAL CAT.
THAT'S RIGHT, CARLOS! IT'S YOUR BIG BRO!
AND SOMETIMES SHE JUST HAS A BIG OL' TURD HANGING FROM IT! LIKE I SAID, NOT A NORMAL CAT!!
UH...
FALLS FOR IT EVERY TIME
D★S

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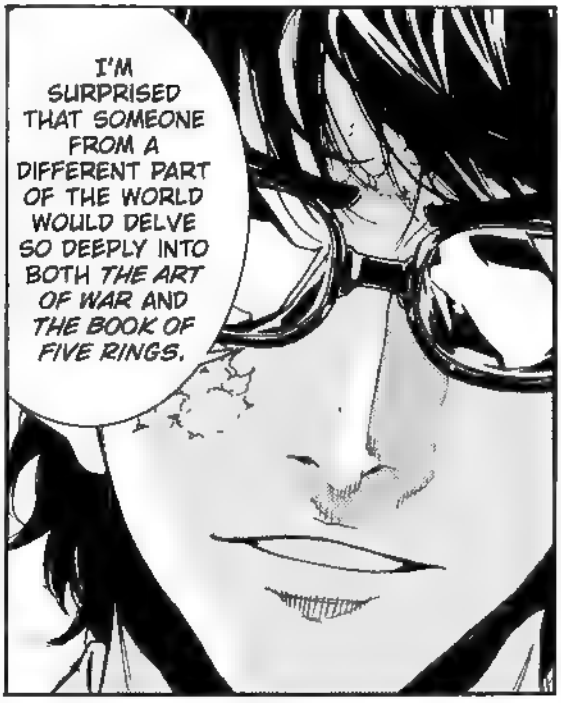
Until
Death
do us
Part

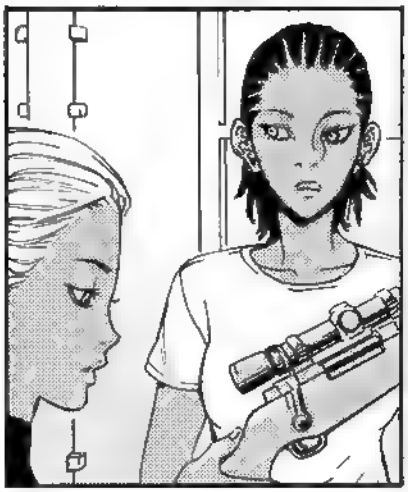
chapter 171

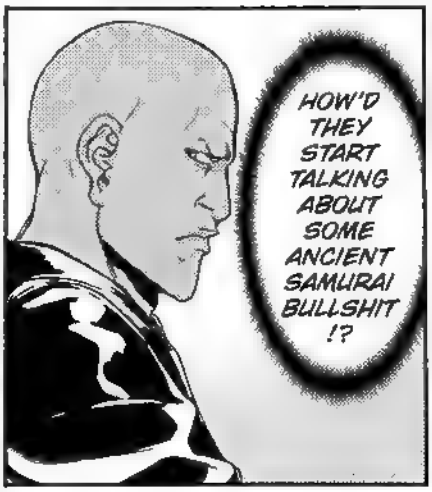
THIS IS THE PREVAILING VIEW IN JAPAN TODAY, AND MY ANALYSIS BACKS IT UP.
AT THE VERY LEAST, HE HAD A PROPER MEANS OF VICTORY FOR JUST ABOUT EVERY DUEL THAT WAS RECORDED.
YOU'RE SAYING THAT MUSASHI ONLY ENTERED FIGHTS HE KNEW HE WAS LIKELY TO WIN?
HE WAS A BRILLIANT MAN, FAR CLEVERER THAN ANYONE AROUND HIM.
HE WAS NOT THE MODEL OF THE "SAMURAI" MENTALITY.
AMONG HIS CONTEMPORARIES, HIS BATTLE TECHNIQUE WAS MUCH CLOSER TO WESTERN PRAGMATISM.

IF YOU REALLY WANT A VIEW INTO THE WAY OF THE BUSHI, THE BEST MANUAL IS *HAGAKURE*.
MM.

I'M AN AVID READER.


I'M SURPRISED THAT SOMEONE FROM A DIFFERENT PART OF THE WORLD WOULD DELVE SO DEEPLY INTO BOTH *THE ART OF WAR* AND *THE BOOK OF FIVE RINGS*.



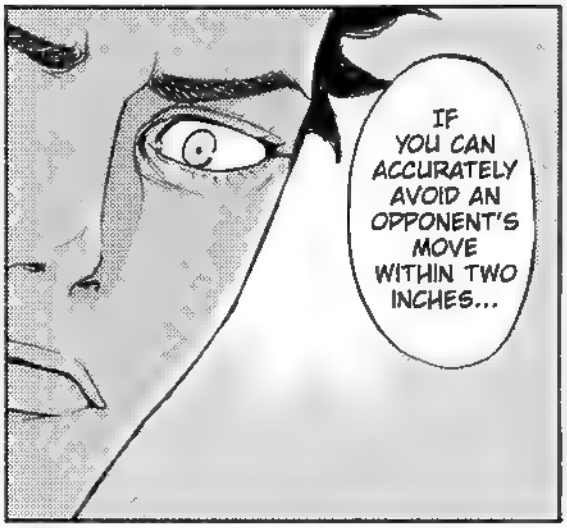

HOW'D THEY START TALKING ABOUT SOME ANCIENT SAMURAI BULLSHIT !?

...

C'MON, I WANT A REMATCH!
SHU (FSS)
SHU

HEY, SAMURAI!
ガチャ
GACHA (CHUNK)

IS YOUR FOOT ALL RIGHT?
THANKS TO THE FACT THAT YOU DIDN'T PIERCE THE BONE.


IF YOU CAN ACCURATELY AVOID AN OPPONENT'S MOVE WITHIN TWO INCHES...

I'M NOT SATISFIED WITH THAT LAST ONE.
LET'S DO IT ONE-ON-ONE THIS TIME. I WASN'T ABLE TO EXECUTE MY FULL STYLE BEFORE.

...THEN ZELM CAN DO IT WITHIN HALF AN INCH.
!?
UNTIL YOU CAN REACH THAT LEVEL, YOU HAVE NO BUSINESS FACING ME OR AEGIS.
YES, EVERY MEMBER OF THE TRUMPS IS FIRST-RATE.
...
BUT THE ONLY OTHER MEMBER EVEN CLOSE TO BEING ULTRA-ELITE IS DEGA OVER THERE.
...FINE... MAYBE HE AIN'T SO DUMB AFTER ALL.

WHAT !?
BA
BUT ASIDE FROM GENIE, ZELM, N'SINH, AND WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE SNIPER SHIEDABRA, NONE OF YOU STAND A CHANCE AGAINST ME.

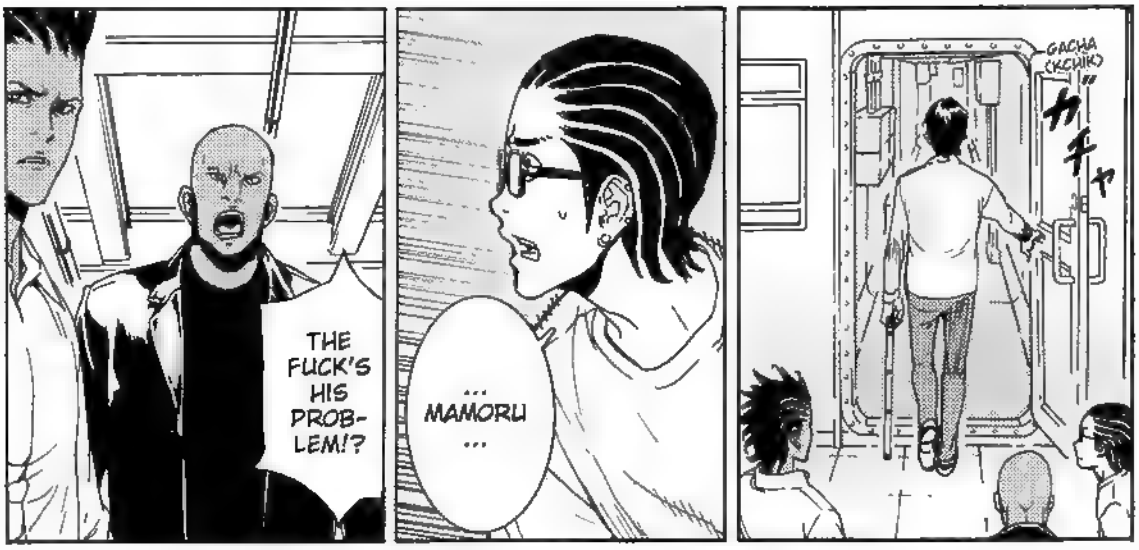
YOU DON'T GET IT.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN!?

I MAY HAVE LOST TO JESUS...
...BUT I DON'T REMEMBER LOSING TO YOU!!

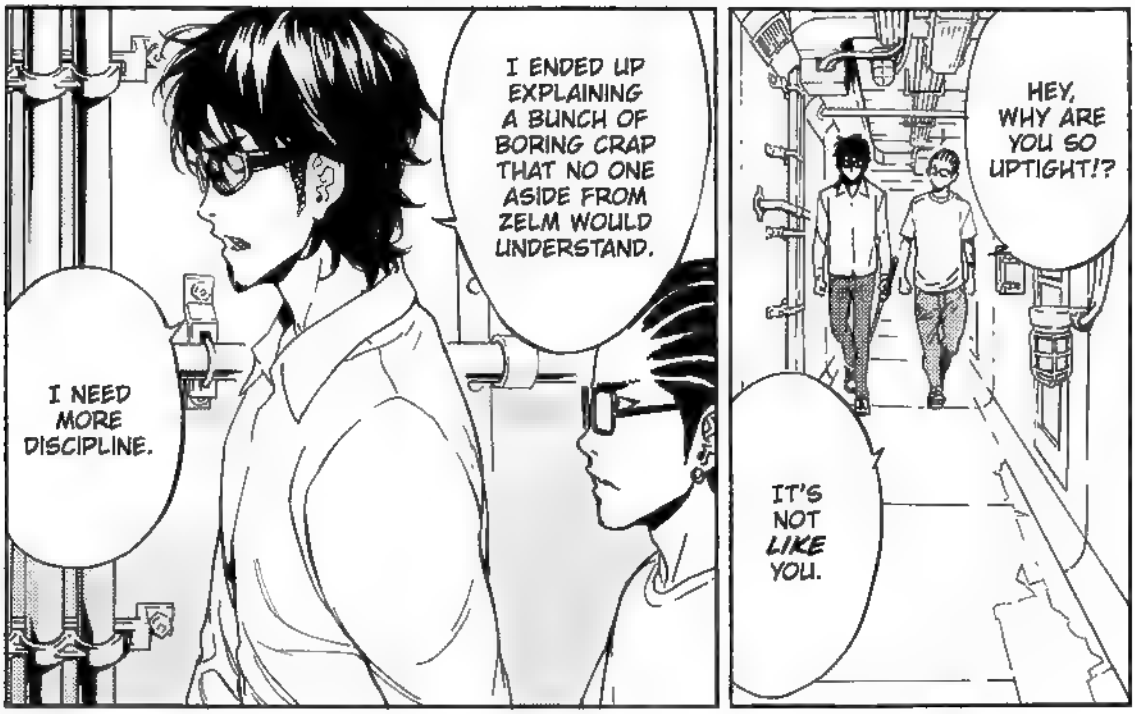
!?
YOU HELD YOUR OWN AGAINST JESUS BECAUSE YOU WERE THE PERFECT MATCH AGAINST HIM.
BUT THIS MAN IS YOUR WORST NIGHTMARE IN THAT REGARD. YOU WOULDN'T LAST A MINUTE!

...
...ARE ESPECIALLY POORLY SUITED TO FIGHT ME.
YOU AND INVISIBLE...
Y-YOU DON'T KNOW THAT UNLESS WE FIGHT!!
WAIT YOUR TURN!
I'M FIRST, SAMURAI!
YOU'RE GONNA USE THAT AS A REASON TO DUCK OUT OF A FIGHT, SAMURAI?

KNOCK IT OFF WITH ALL THE "SAMURAI" CRAP!
SHUT UP!!
SAMURAI IS ONLY FOR PEOPLE WHO WORK ADMIRABLY AND HONORABLY FOR THEIR IDEALS!!
I'M JUST A SWORDSMAN! CARRYING A KATANA AND SWINGING IT AROUND DOESN'T MAKE YOU A SAMURAI!! GOT THAT, FOREIGNERS!?

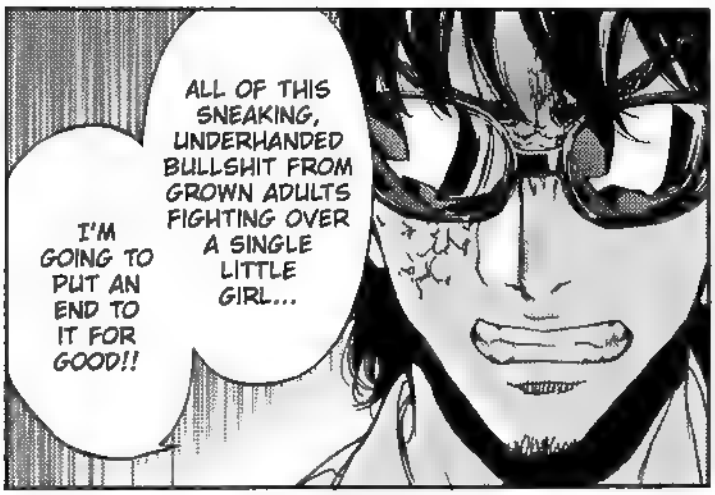

THE FUCK'S HIS PROB-LEM!?
... MAMORU ...
GACHA (KCHIK)
ガチャ

...


I NEED MORE DISCIPLINE.
I ENDED UP EXPLAINING A BUNCH OF BORING CRAP THAT NO ONE ASIDE FROM ZELM WOULD UNDERSTAND.
IT'S NOT LIKE YOU.
HEY, WHY ARE YOU SO UPTIGHT!?

I'M RIGHT, AREN'T I?
...
ARE YOU IRRITATED ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO AGENT GENDA?
I BEAR RESPONSI-BILITY—NO, NOT QUITE. I'M NOT SURE HOW TO SAY IT.
THE CONNECTION BETWEEN US THAT I CREATED CAUSED ME TO EVENTUALLY OWE HIM A DEBT.
IF I DON'T FREE HARUKA SOON, I'LL HAVE A HARD TIME SLEEPING, KNOWING THAT IT'S GONE UNPAID.

I SUPPOSE YOU COULD SEE HIM AS A MANIFESTATION OF THAT VERY CODE.
I SEE...A "SAMURAI," HUH...


ALL OF THIS SNEAKING, UNDERHANDED BULLSHIT FROM GROWN ADULTS FIGHTING OVER A SINGLE LITTLE GIRL...
I'M GOING TO PUT AN END TO IT FOR GOOD!!

IS THAT WHY YOU RUSHED THE PLAN?
EX-ACTLY.

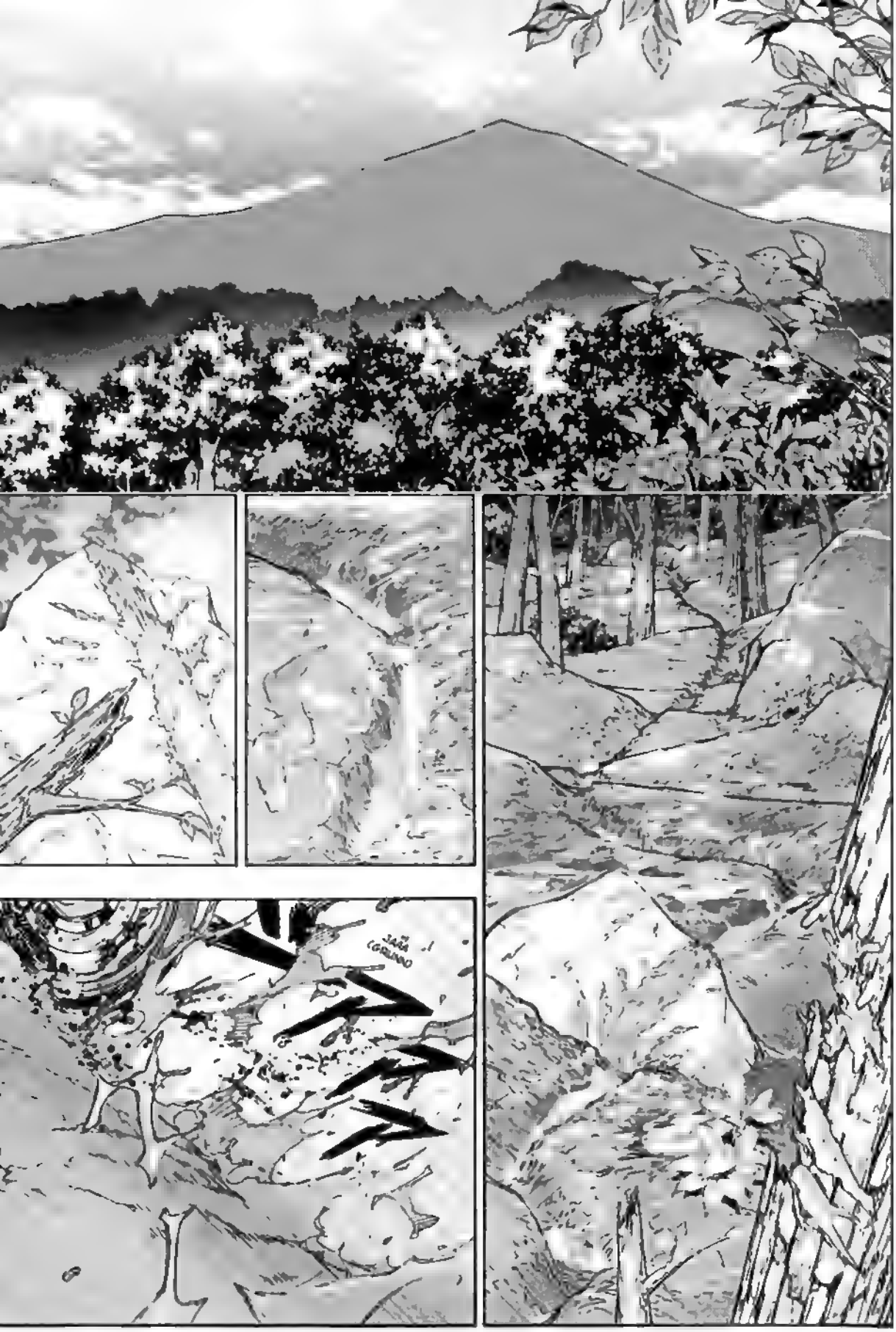
A THOUSAND SLICES WOULDN'T BE ENOUGH FOR THE LIKES OF HIM.
HE'S THE ASSHOLE WHO CREATED THIS SITUATION IN THE FIRST PLACE.
I FEEL SORRY FOR WHAT TURUS GOT DRAGGED INTO.

MAKES SENSE, I GUESS.
SO THAT'S WHY HE DOESN'T JUST KILL THE GUY...
ZELM?
KO
...AND I CAN'T HAVE THEM FLYING OFF THE HANDLE OVER THIS SQUABBLE WHEN IT COUNTS.
DO YOU MIND SPARRING WITH THESE TWO FOR A BIT? WE'VE GOT IMPORTANT WORK LATER...

YOUR PUPILS MUST BE PRETTY STUPID IF THEY NEED TO LEARN THIS LESSON THE HARD WAY.
I SEE. YOU WANT TO SEPARATE THE MEN FROM THE BOYS.
WELL, OF COURSE YOU DO.
I MUST SADLY AGREE.
I CHOSE THEM FOR THOSE VERY QUALITIES.
I LIKE GUYS LIKE THAT.
BUT AT LEAST THEY'RE DEDICATED AND STUB-BORN.

WHO'S FIRST!?

Until
Death
do us
Part


JAAA
(GRUNT)

chapter 172

WINNING !!
UGH...

YOU'RE TAKING TOO LONG, IBUKI!!
DON'T ACT LIKE IT SHOULD BE EASY! THERE'S ALL KINDS OF PROBLEMS HERE!!
MY MACHINE'S BUILT FOR THE CITY! NOBODY RETUNES A BIKE LIKE THAT TO PLAY IN THE MUD!!
HE'S NOT BUILT TO FINE-TUNE AN INTER-FACE THAT ACTUAL HUMAN BEINGS USE!
IF YOU JUST TOLD HIM WHICH NUMBERS TO USE, I'M SURE IT WOULD WORK JUST FINE.
BUT IBUKI DOES THINGS BY FEEL, SO HE WOULDN'T KNOW THEM...
COULDN'T YOU JUST USE SPARC?
THE BOSS LET US USE HIM WITHOUT RESERVA-TION.
WELL, HE AIN'T HUMAN, SO HE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND THE FINER DETAILS.

UGH...

BUT EVEN OUTSIDE OF IDEAL CONDITIONS, HIJIKATA NEVER MADE EXCUSES

キュルルルル

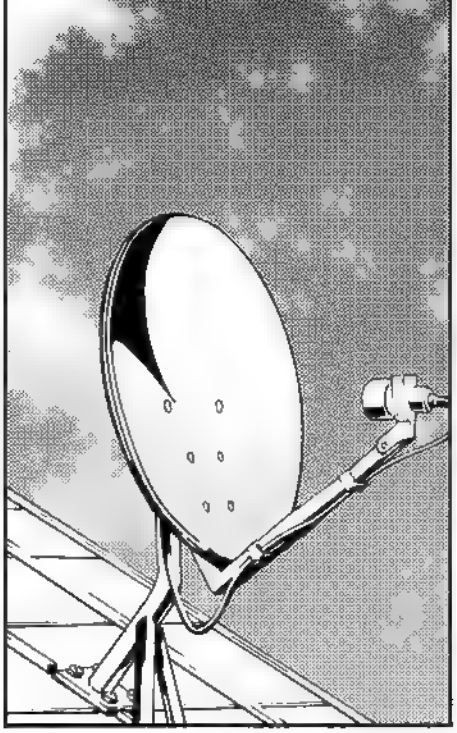
JUST WAIT...I'LL BLOW YOUR MIND!!
ギュイイイ

Y-YOU WANT TO ME TO DO IT? FINE!!

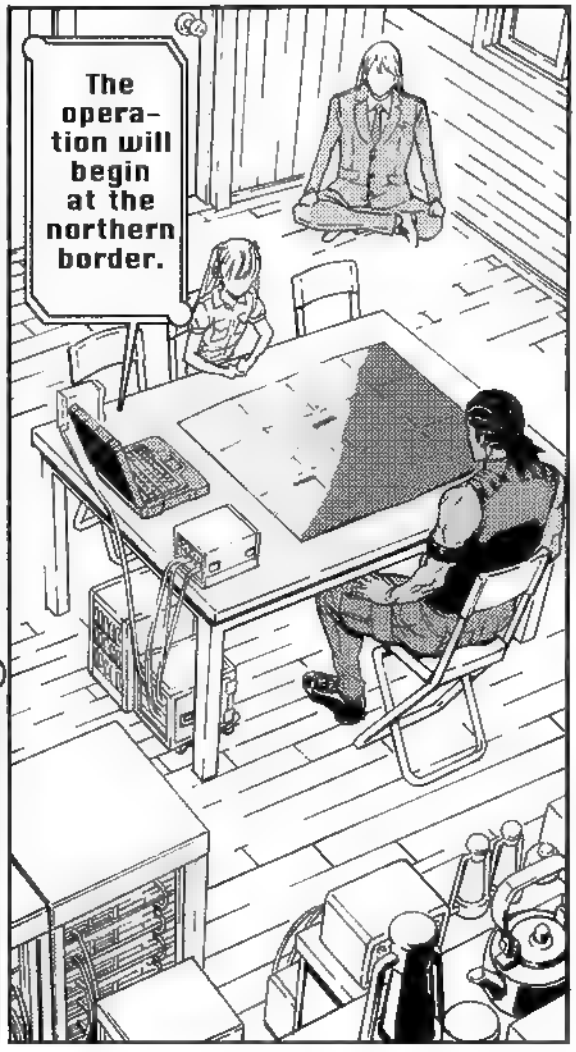
BEHAVE, DAMMIT!

NYAARGH!!
HE'S A GENIUS, NO DOUBT ABOUT IT
WHAT KIND OF ARM STRENGTH IS THAT?
HE CLEARED THE COURSE ON WILL-POWER ALONE
ゴッ
RAAAH!!

GULP!
...I SUPPOSE GENIUS AND IDIOCY CAN CO-EXIST...
DAMN ...
AAAAAAAAAA-
SADLY... HE'S ALSO AN IDIOT.

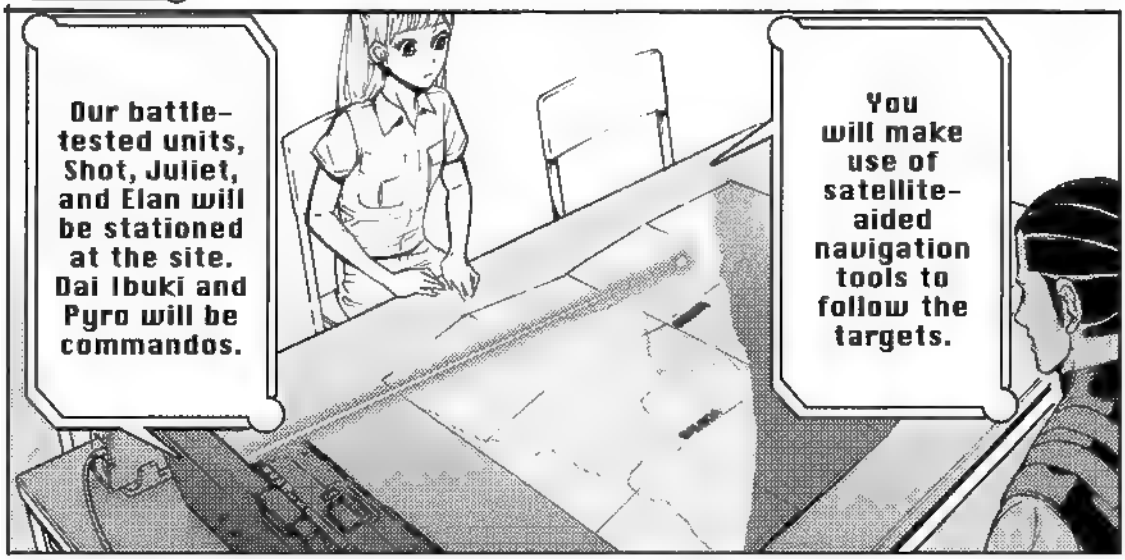


SPARC
speaking
Unlike with Galboa, Duhana's border security is a sieve — the black market needs foreigners to be able to visit without trouble.


The operation will begin at the northern border.

IT SOUNDS LIKE A HORRIBLE PLACE...
FOR IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES, THERE'S NOTHING TO BE GAINED BY GOING TO DUHANA.
ON THE OTHER HAND, THEY HAVE FULLY-MANNED FORCES TO KEEP THEIR OWN PEOPLE FROM LEAVING. BE WARY OF THEM.
EXACTLY. IT'S A COUNTRY OF EXTREME POVERTY AND OPPRESSION.

That should give you time to adjust to the local weather.
SPARC speaking
ピッ
PI (PING)
The team will be on location to prepare a week before Mamoru Hijikata is scheduled to arrive.


Our battle-tested units, Shot, Juliet, and Elan will be stationed at the site. Dai Ibuki and Pyro will be commandos.
You will make use of satellite-aided navigation tools to follow the targets.

Senji-san will stay in the command vehicle with me to protect the base of operations.
ROGER!
...
Miss Haruka, we have received a recommendation on the topic of reinforcements.
SPARC speaking
WHO?
WHAT ROLES WOULD THEY PLAY?
COMMANDER, TO BE HONEST, WE'RE LOW ON SUPPORT AT PRESENT.
I'D LIKE TO REQUEST MORE MEMBERS JUST TO BE SAFE.
By word of Anna Riddle.
The sniper named Ashe.

KIKI (SCREECH)
Elan has arrived.
I will look into the matter.
ASHE-SAN!?
GACHA (CLICK)
ZA (ZSH)

SIERRA-SAN!?

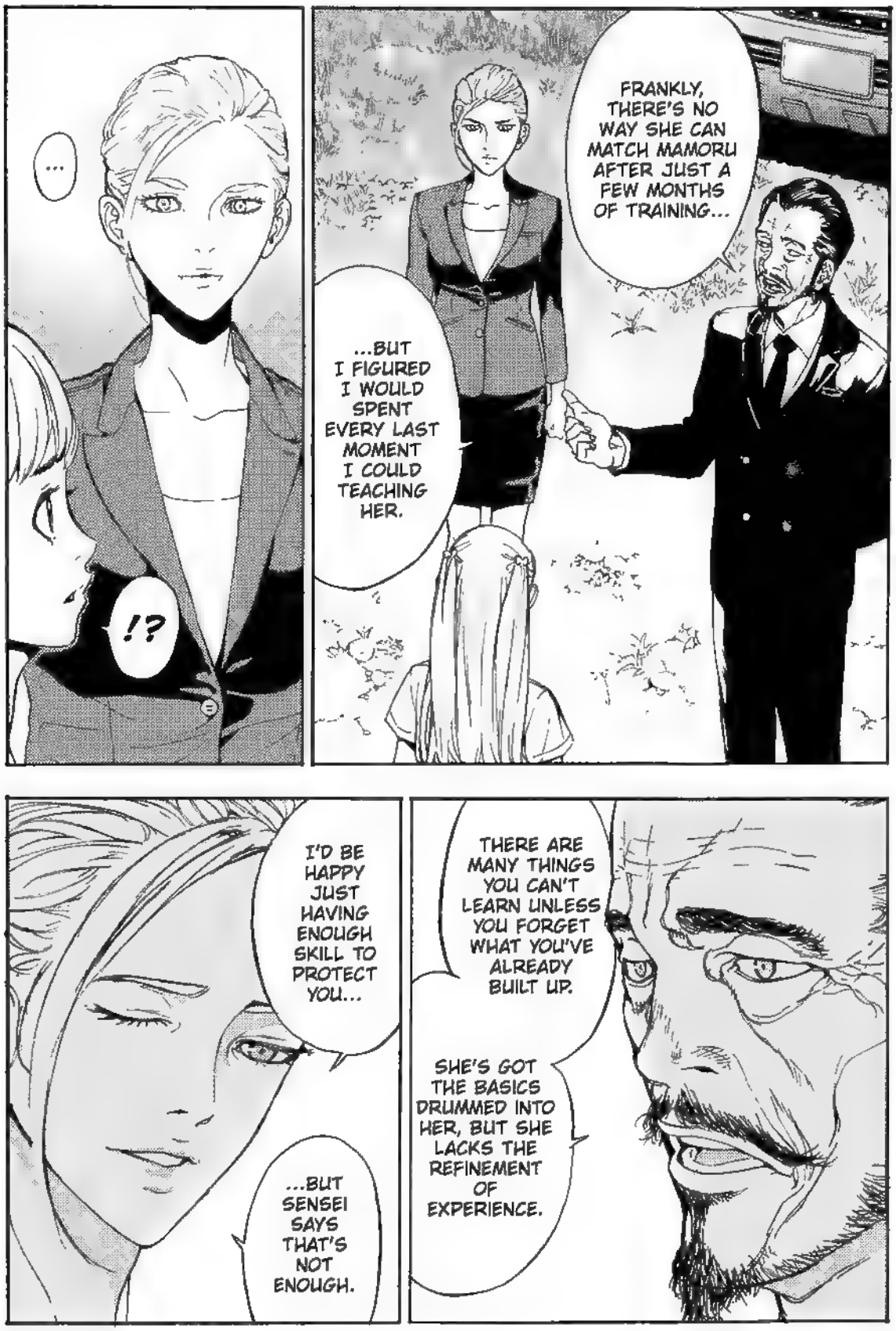
SORRY IT TOOK SO LONG TO SHOW MY FACE AGAIN.
AND I'VE LEFT THE WALL, SO NOW MY CODENAME IS JUST ELAN.

FORGIVE ME FOR ARRIVING LATE. I'M HERE TO JOIN THE TEAM.

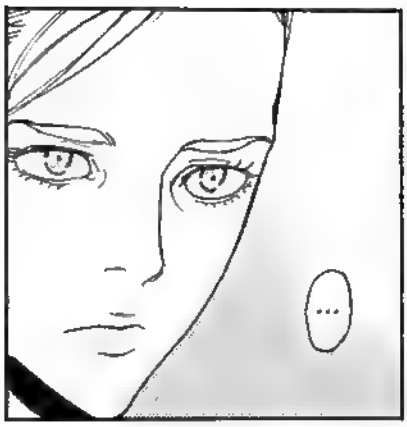
!?
INABA-SENSEI ...???
IT'S BEEN A WHILE!
SENJI !?

YOU KNOW EACH OTHER?
HE WAS A TERRIBLE FORMER DISCIPLE OF MINE!
I-I-INABA-SENSEI!
EEEP!
AND I WAS LURED BY THOSE STORIES INTO JOINING HIS SCHOOL...
BACK IN HOKKAIDO, THEY SAID THAT TESSHUU INABA-SENSEI WAS AN UNBEATABLE SWORDSMAN, A MODERN-DAY MUSASHI.
SENJI-SAN WAS?
HE HAD PROMISE AS A PUPIL.
SPENT THREE YEARS WITH US IN HIS TEENS, THEN JUST DISAPPEARED WITHOUT A TRACE ONE DAY.
HMM, ODD STORY... I'VE NEVER HEARD THAT ONE BEFORE...
REALLY!?

NO WAY, NO HOW! I COULDN'T POSSIBLY EMBARRASS MYSELF BY CLAIMING SENIORITY OVER A MASTER LIKE HIM!
DOESN'T THAT MEAN YOU WERE MAMORU-SAN'S SENIOR AS APPREN-TICES!?
AFTER THAT, I SELF-STUDIED ...
YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT YOUTH AND STUPIDITY— ONCE I HAD A BIT OF CONFIDENCE, I WANTED TO GO OUT INTO THE WORLD AND TEST IT.
AND YOU WOUND UP A YAKUZA OF ALL THINGS! IT'S AN EMBARRASS-MENT!
N-NAT-URALLY, SENSEI!
OF COURSE YOU CAN'T! I EXPELLED YOU FROM THE SCHOOL AGES AGO!!
I CAME TO TOKYO TO PAY MY RESPECTS TO GENDA.
...

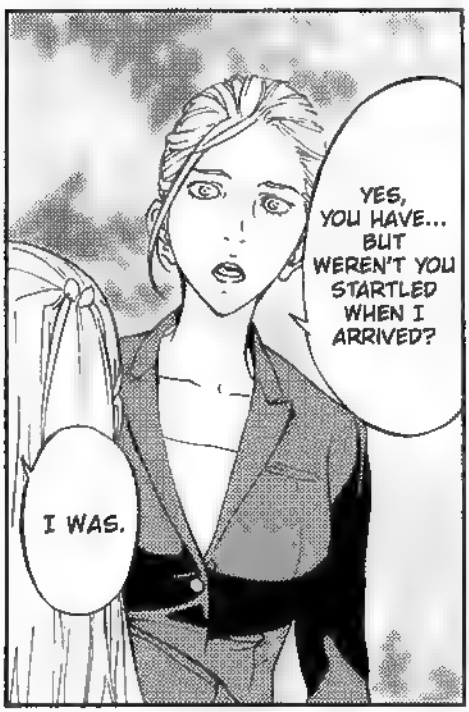

...
!?
FRANKLY, THERE'S NO WAY SHE CAN MATCH MAMORU AFTER JUST A FEW MONTHS OF TRAINING...
...BUT I FIGURED I WOULD SPENT EVERY LAST MOMENT I COULD TEACHING HER.
I'D BE HAPPY JUST HAVING ENOUGH SKILL TO PROTECT YOU...
...BUT SENSEI SAYS THAT'S NOT ENOUGH.
THERE ARE MANY THINGS YOU CAN'T LEARN UNLESS YOU FORGET WHAT YOU'VE ALREADY BUILT UP.
SHE'S GOT THE BASICS DRUMMED INTO HER, BUT SHE LACKS THE REFINEMENT OF EXPERIENCE.

PARDON ME.
DO YOU THINK YOU COULD GIVE ME SOME LESSONS TOO!?
I CAN'T TOSS A PUPIL OUT INTO THE WILD TO DIE!
OF COURSE NOT!
THANK YOU, SIR.
IT WAS GENDA WHO BROUGHT US HERE. I MIGHT AS WELL CARE FOR ALL OF YOU.
VERY WELL.
I WISH TO DO MY PROPER DUTY TO THE YOUNG MISS AS A BULLET SPONGE!!
...WHAT COMES NEXT WILL BE A BIT ROUGH.
NOW...

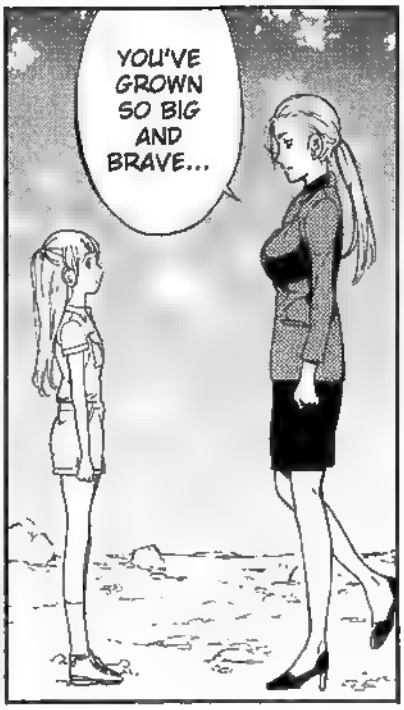

...

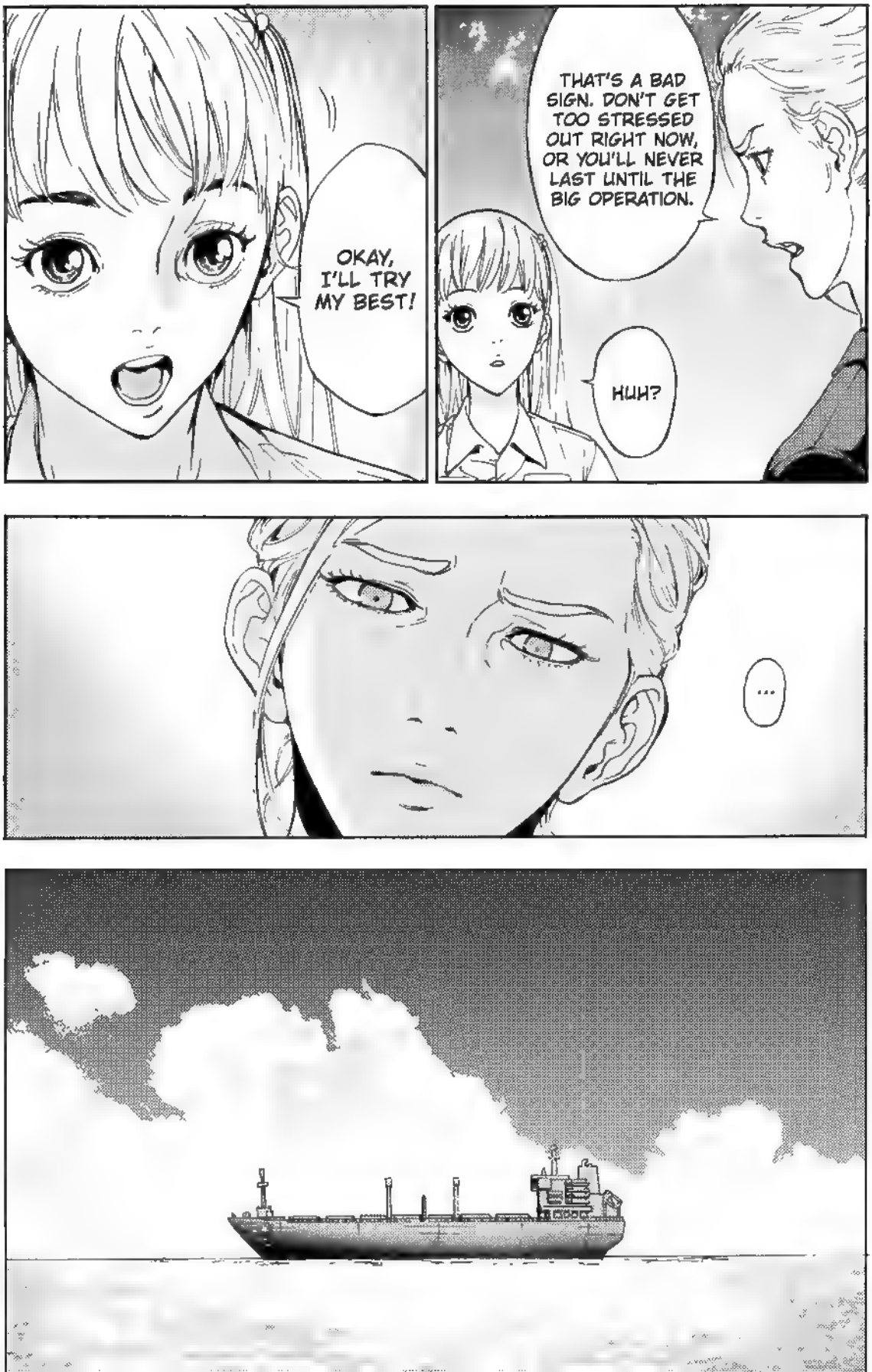
TH...
THANK YOU, SIR.

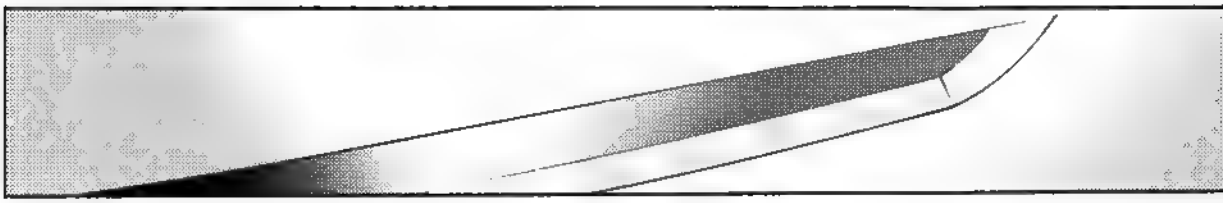
PREPARE YOUR-SELVES.


YES, YOU HAVE... BUT WEREN'T YOU STARTLED WHEN I ARRIVED?
I WAS.

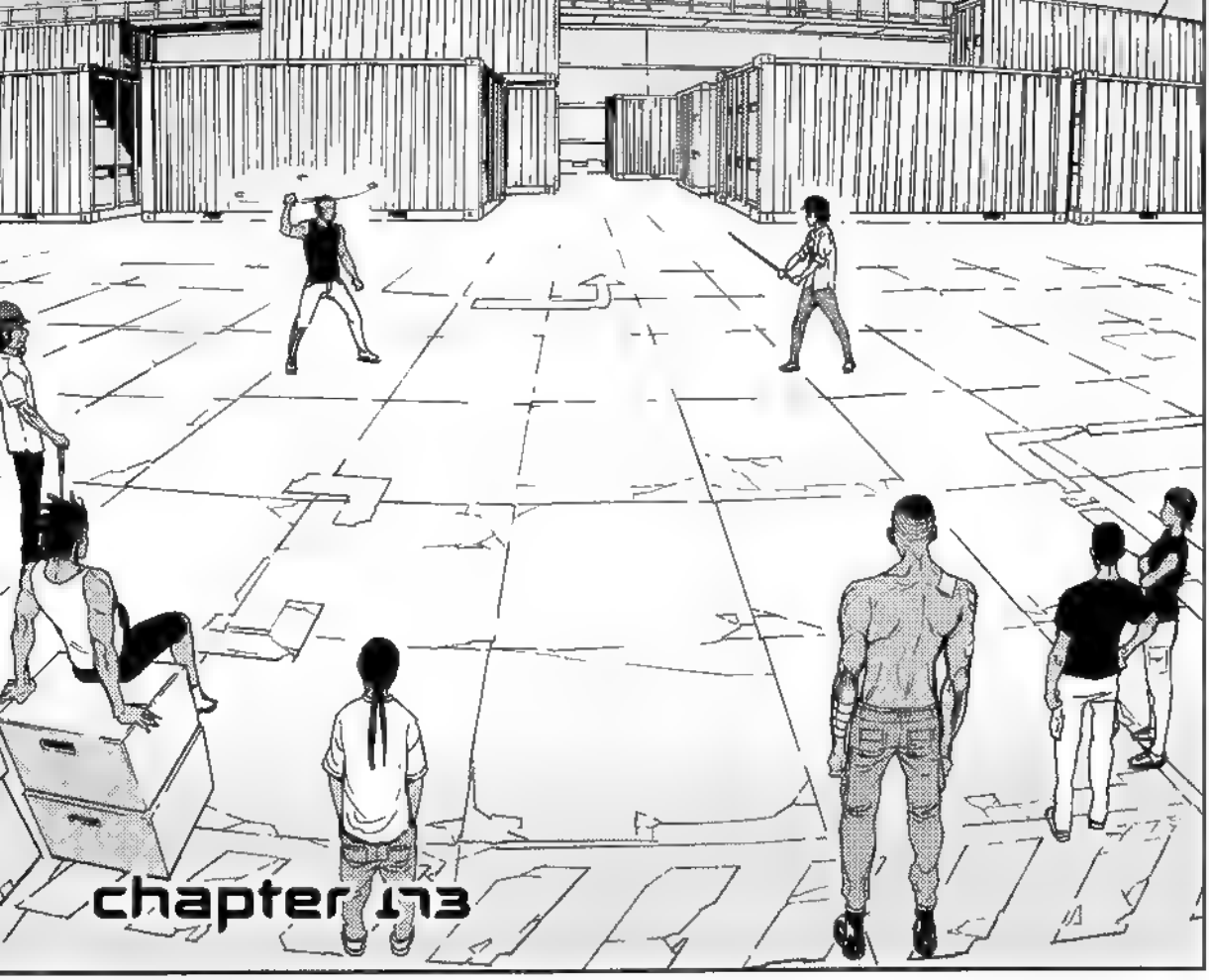
?
I HAVE? I CAN'T TELL.


YOU'VE GROWN SO BIG AND BRAVE...


OKAY, I'LL TRY MY BEST!
THAT'S A BAD SIGN. DON'T GET TOO STRESSED OUT RIGHT NOW, OR YOU'LL NEVER LAST UNTIL THE BIG OPERATION.
HUH?
...



Until
Death
do us
Part


chapter 173

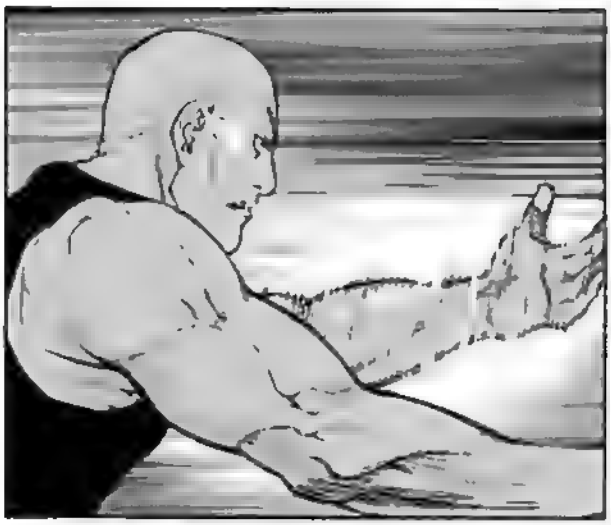
JUST WAIT...I'LL SEND YOU SPRAWLING THIS TIME...

I ADMIRE YOUR DEDICATION...
THAT'S THREE LOSSES IN A ROW FOR YOU...
SHUT UP!!

BUO (VWOOM)
HYU (SWISH)
TAN (TOMP)
GYURU (SPIN)
!?

HYUN
PASHI (SNATCH)
I SEE. YOU BOUNCED IT OFF THE CORNER OF THE CONTAINER ...
...CAUSING THE WEIGHT TO COUNTER-SPIN AND TAKE AN UNEXPECTED HOP.
BUT TRICKS LIKE THAT WON'T HELP YOU ERASE YOUR WEAPON'S FLAWS.

CHECK THIS OUT!!
HMPH! SAVE YOUR CROWING FOR WHEN YOU'VE WON!!

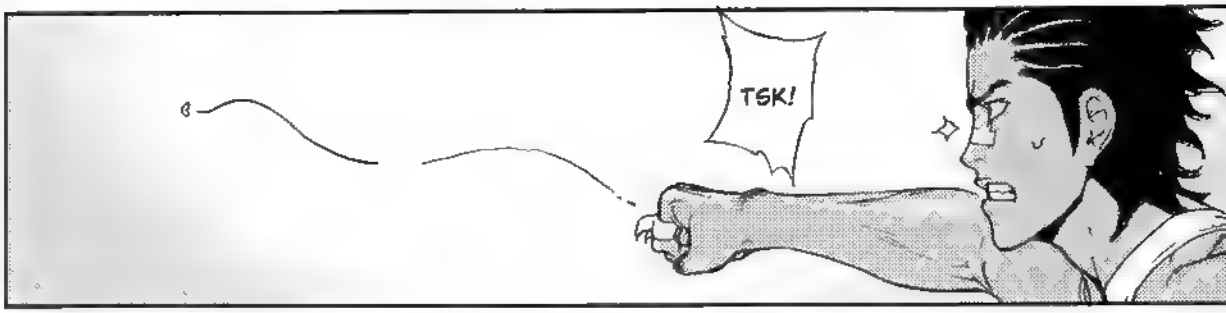


ANOTHER BALL IN THE SAME SPOT!?

KIN (TING)
UGH!
ZA (ZSSH)

...
THAT ONE ACTUALLY MADE ME SWEAT, BUT IF YOU'D COME UP WITH THAT LITTLE TRICK A BIT EARLIER, YOU MIGHT'VE SHOWN JESUS A THING OR TWO.
YOU'VE MADE GREAT PROGRESS OVER THESE THREE FIGHTS.
JUST NOT NEARLY ENOUGH TO MAKE UP FOR YOUR DISADVAN-TAGE.
THESE FLIES ARE BUGGING ME.
TAKE 'EM OUT WITH YOUR SPECIAL PUNCH.
NEXT UP IS ME.
KAN
KAN (CLACK)

BO (VOOM)
HEH!


TSK!

HMPH!
HYU (SWISH)

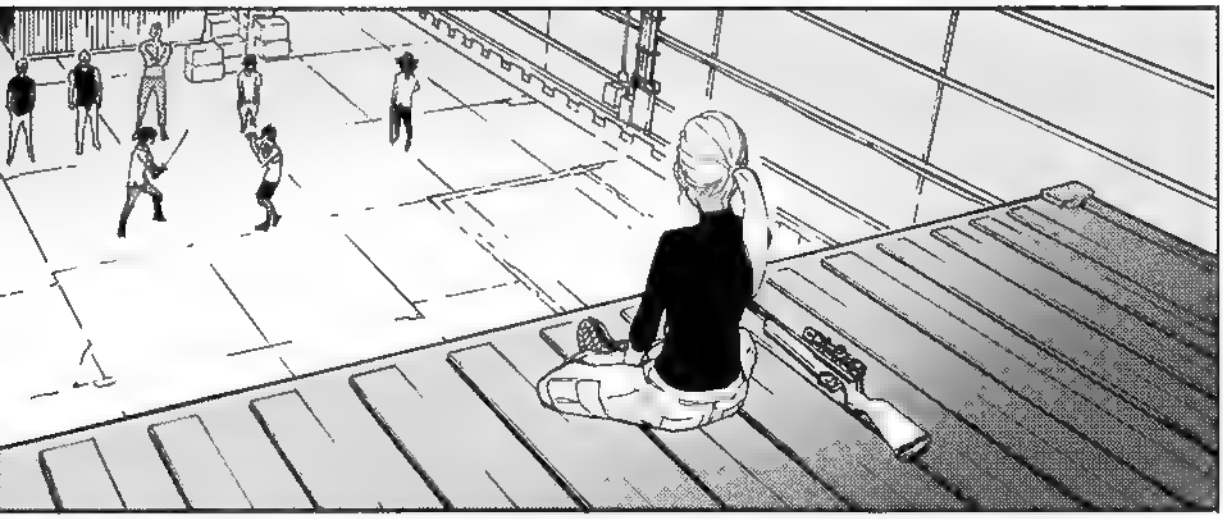
YOU GOTTA BE CRAZY! YOU CAN'T AIM AT A TINY THING LIKE THAT!

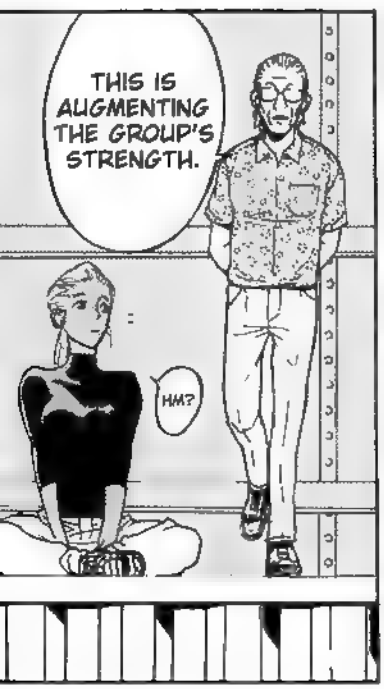
IF YOU WANT TO DROP A FLY, YOU EITHER HAVE TO PUNCH FASTER OR AIM WITH THE KNUCKLE SPIKES.

KASA (SKITTER)
カサ
KASA
カサ
A FLY CAN TURN 90 DEGREES IN JUST 30 MILLI-SECONDS.
HUMAN REFLEXES ARE PHYSICALLY INCAPABLE OF KNOCKING ONE OUT OF THE AIR.
HUH ???
...YOU'RE RIGHT. IT'S IMPOS-SIBLE...
WHA —!?

HUH!? UM, BY...
IN FACT, HUMAN REFLEXES ARE SLOWER THAN MOST ANIMALS' AND INSECTS'.
BUT THERE'S A FAMOUS CLAIM THAT THE GREAT MIYAMOTO MUSASHI GRABBED A FLY OUT OF THE AIR WITH HIS CHOP-STICKS. HOW DO YOU SUPPOSE HE DID THAT?
RIGHT. BY THINKING.
YOU BEAT A LION TO DEATH, DIDN'T YOU?
YOU BEAT THE LION'S REACTION SPEED. THERE'S NO REASON YOU COULDN'T ACHIEVE THAT.
BECAUSE WITH EXPERIENCE, YOU CAN WATCH THE FLY'S SPEED AND TRAJECTORY AND ACCURATELY PREDICT WHERE IT WILL GO NEXT.
IT'S ONLY THE SUPERIOR HUMAN TRAIT OF IMAGINATION THAT MAKES THIS POSSIBLE.

NOW LET'S BEGIN.

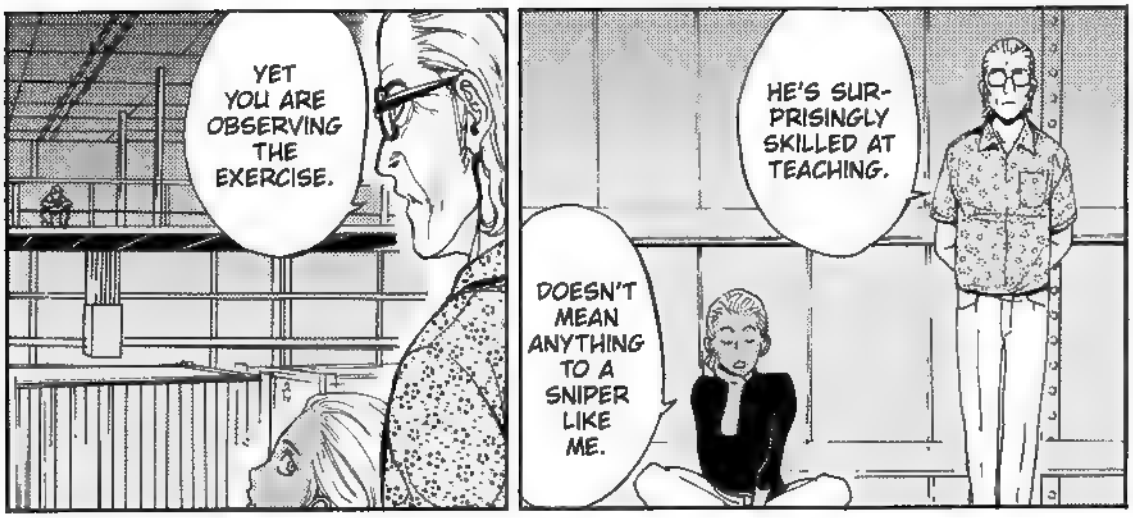


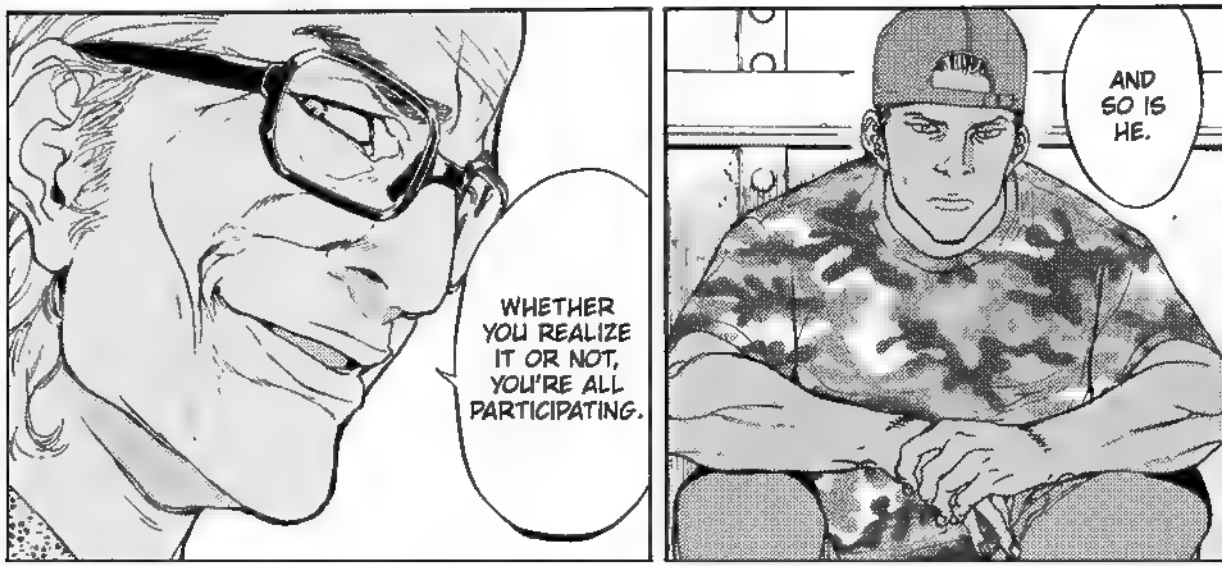

THIS IS AUGMENTING THE GROUP'S STRENGTH.
HM?

AFTER ALL THE BOASTING, THEY'RE GETTING ALONG JUST FINE.
THE OLD BADGER.

WHO SAID THEY COULD HAVE FUN DOWN THERE?

HMM.
AND MAMORU HIJIKATA IS GOING ALONG WITH IT. HE KNOWS WHAT'S HAPPENING.
THE MORE EXPERIENCED THE TEAM, THE SMOOTHER THE PLAN WILL GO.
THAT WAS PART OF ZELM'S IDEA.


YET YOU ARE OBSERVING THE EXERCISE.
HE'S SURPRISINGLY SKILLED AT TEACHING.
DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING TO A SNIPER LIKE ME.

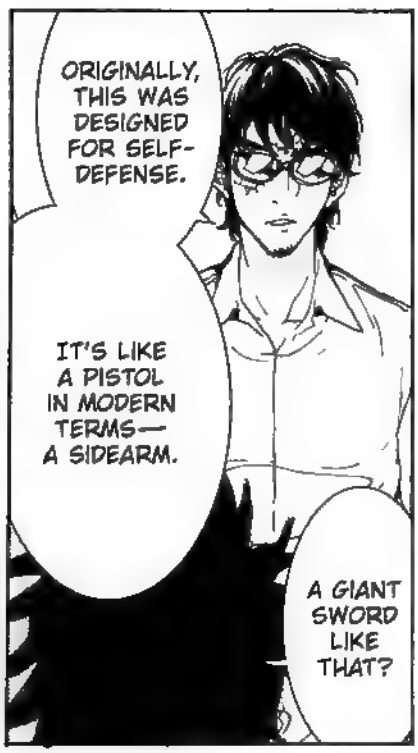

WHETHER YOU REALIZE IT OR NOT, YOU'RE ALL PARTICIPATING.
AND SO IS HE.

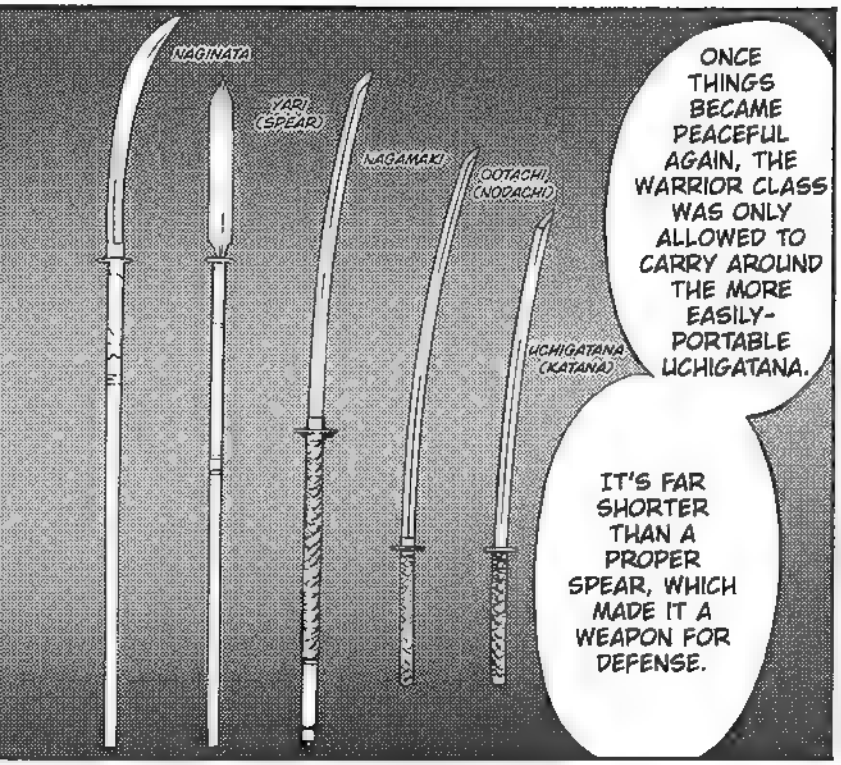
WHO KNOWS WHO MIGHT BE AN ENEMY AFTER THIS OPERATION IS OVER?
NO HARM IN LEARNING THEIR TRICKS WHILE I CAN.
...YOU'RE PLENTY CRAFTY YOURSELF.
ZUSHAAA (ZSSHH)
WHY WON'T IT WORK!?
SHIT!!
GON (THUD)

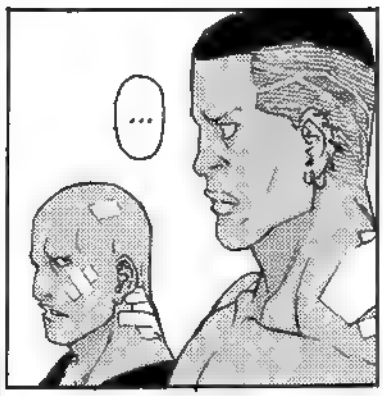
BECAUSE YOU ALL HAVE A FUNDAMENTAL MISUNDER-STANDING OF THE KATANA.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

THINK OF WHEN IT WAS DEVELOPED, FOOL.
BACK IN THE SENGOKU ERA, IF YOU SURVIVED THE FLINTLOCKS AND BOWS, THE PRIMARY WEAPONS WERE POLEARMS LIKE SPEARS AND NAGINATAS!


ORIGINALLY, THIS WAS DESIGNED FOR SELF-DEFENSE.
IT'S LIKE A PISTOL IN MODERN TERMS— A SIDEARM.
A GIANT SWORD LIKE THAT?


NAGINATA
YARI (SPEAR)
NAGAMAKI
OOTACHI (NODACHI)
UCHIGATANA (KATANA)
ONCE THINGS BECAME PEACEFUL AGAIN, THE WARRIOR CLASS WAS ONLY ALLOWED TO CARRY AROUND THE MORE EASILY-PORTABLE UCHIGATANA.
IT'S FAR SHORTER THAN A PROPER SPEAR, WHICH MADE IT A WEAPON FOR DEFENSE.


...

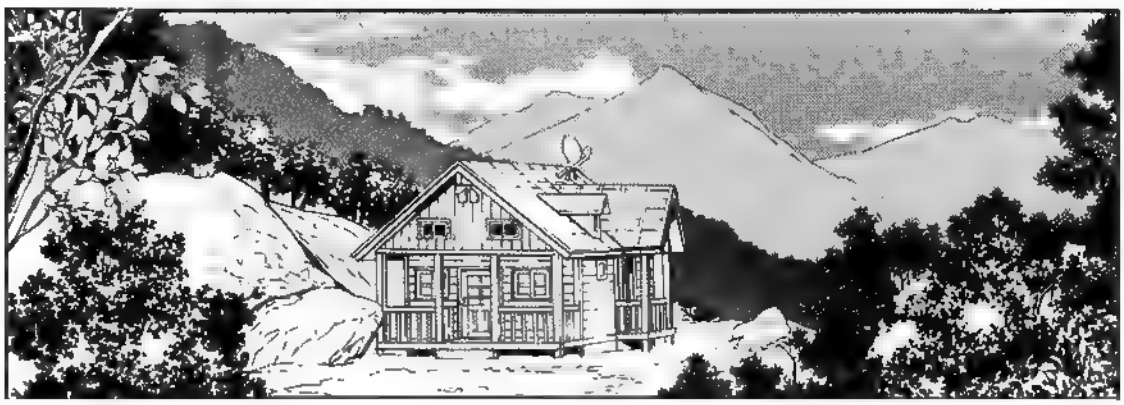
IF YOU CHALLENGE SOMEONE WITH A TOOL LIKE THAT, IT NATURALLY CHANGES HOW YOU APPROACH THEM, DOESN'T IT?
THE TRUE VALUE OF A KATANA IS ITS ABILITY TO DEFEND.

PUT A NAGAMAKI IN MY HANDS...
...AND I'LL HAVE FIVE TIMES THE DESTRUCTIVE POWER.

WHY NOT JUST USE A DAMN SPEAR!?
THEN WHY DO YOU FIGHT WITH THAT THING!?
...
...I SEE...
BECAUSE *THIS* IS WHAT I'M BEST SUITED TO SWING.
THE ONLY TIME I COMPROMISED ON THAT WAS WHEN I USED THE LONG NODACHI AGAINST ZELM.
SAMURAI'S HOLDING THE REINS NOW.
... HEH ...

NEXT!!
BUT THAT'S ALL FINE AND GOOD. FIGHTING THE STRONG WILL MAKE YOU STRONGER.
...WITHOUT HAVING AVENGED MY SHAME ...
I CAN'T RETURN TO GALBOA LIKE THIS ...

DAD WILL KILL ME...

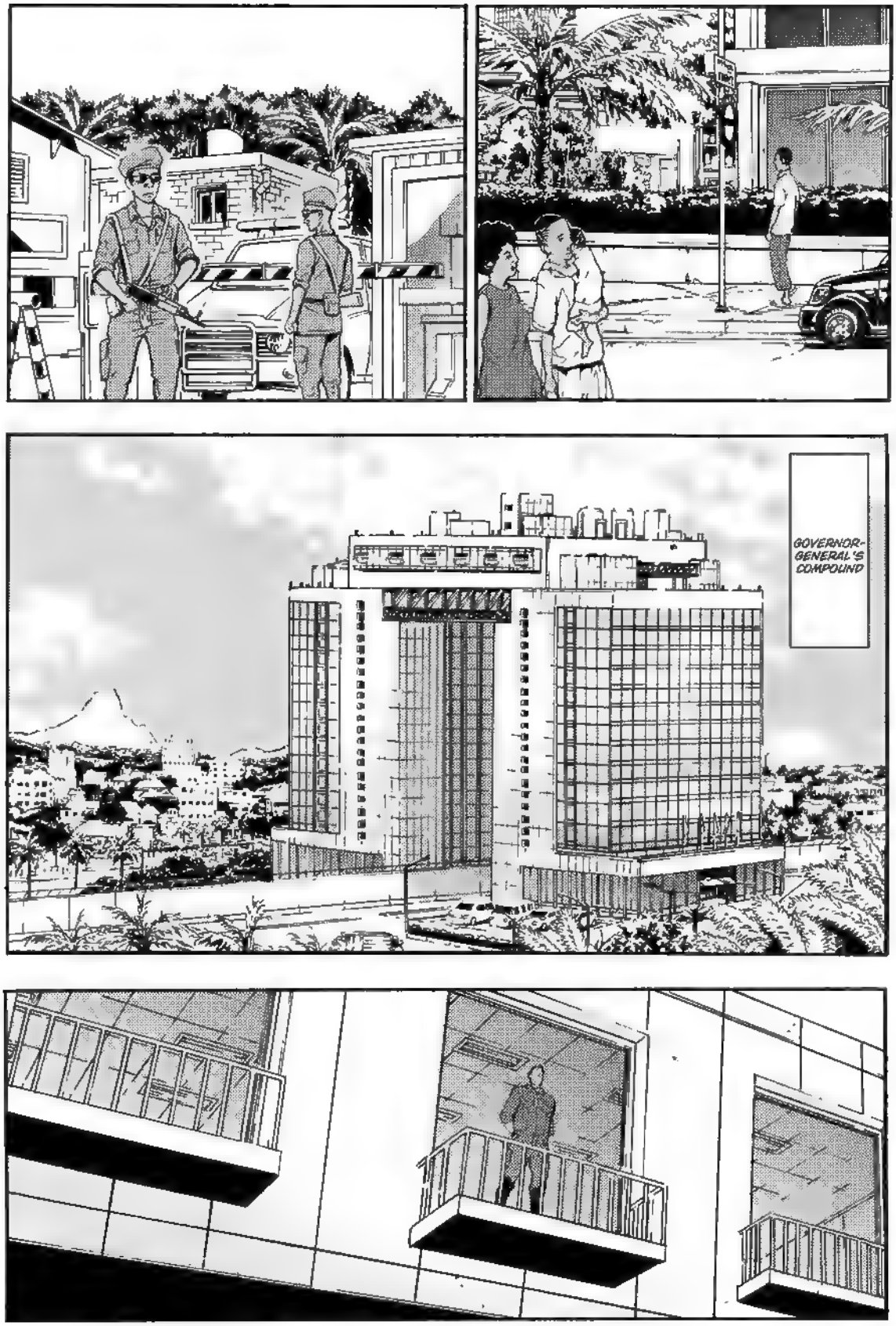


The man who rules over the quasi-state of Duhana is Colonel Zashid Turus.
His precise age is unclear, but estimates put it between 35 and 50.
SPARC speaking
He belongs to a local tribe ethnically, but his ancestors mixed blood over and over...
...to the point that his own ethnic makeup is impossible to categorize.
SPARC speaking
All around Africa, he is known as "Mr. Darkside."
In recognition of this, he wears a striking tattoo pattern that integrates his back ground into his physical features.
This is the only available footage of him.

!?

OH... HE'S SCARY...

WE CAN'T! NOBODY CAN MATCH HIM NOT EVEN MAMIRU SAN
I CAN'T LET THE TWO OF THEM MEET!!
CHAPTER 9 RUNNING OUT


GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S COMPOUND

COLONEL.
THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE TRANSPLANT CONNECTION IS REQUESTING TO SEE YOU AT ONCE.

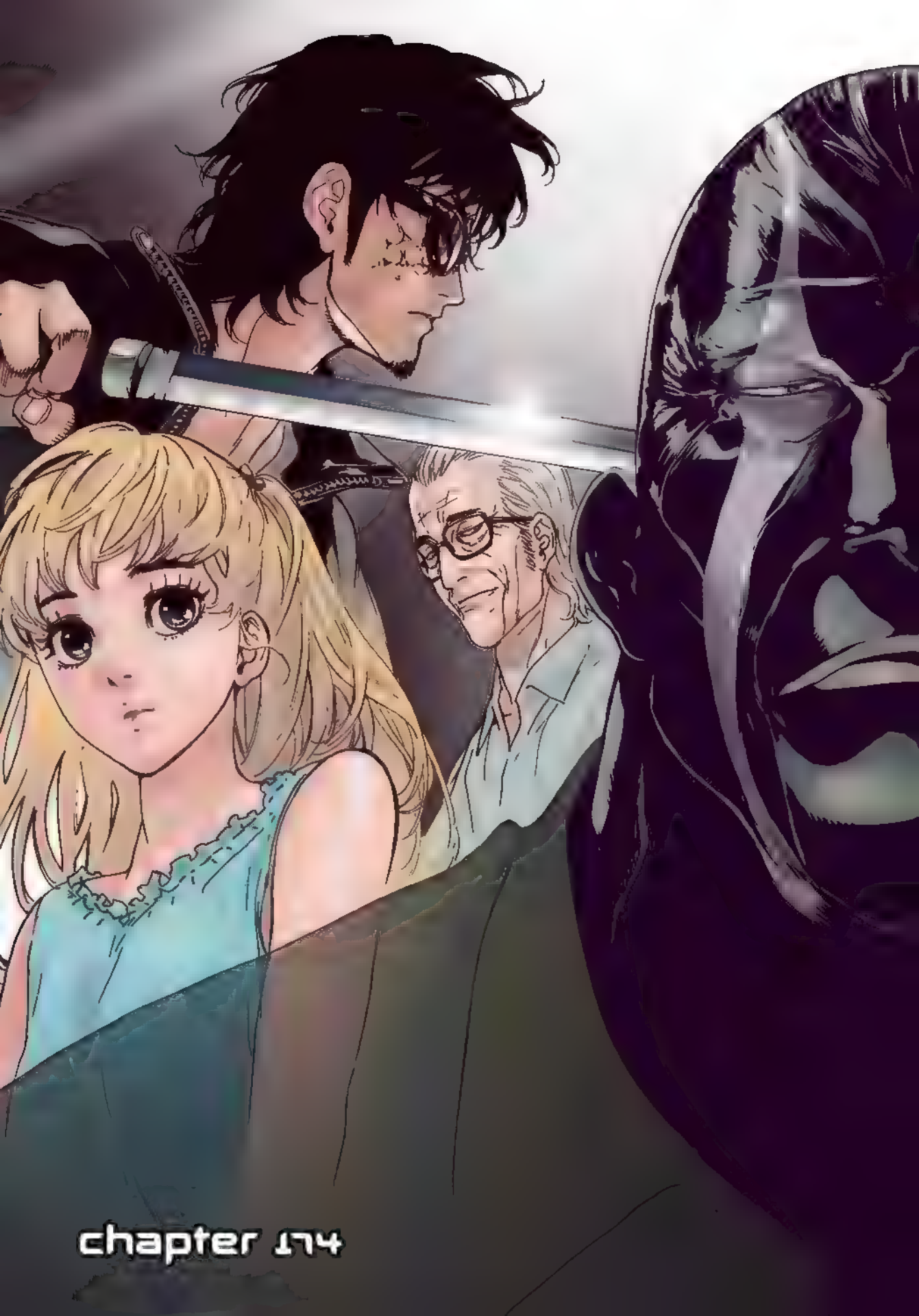
KEEP HIM WAITING.

ズシャア
(MISSED)
ZUSHAA

Until
Death
do us
Part

BUT, COLONEL ...
I'M IN NO MOOD TO MEET WITH THESE UNDERLINGS.
HMPH. AN AUDIENCE?
MR. DARK-SIDE.
THEY OUGHT TO STAY QUIET AND PRODUCE HUMANS LIKE THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO.
WE OUGHT TO BE ON EQUAL FOOTING.
...
YOU CAN'T JUST IGNORE US OUT OF HAND. WE'RE YOUR BUSINESS PARTNERS.

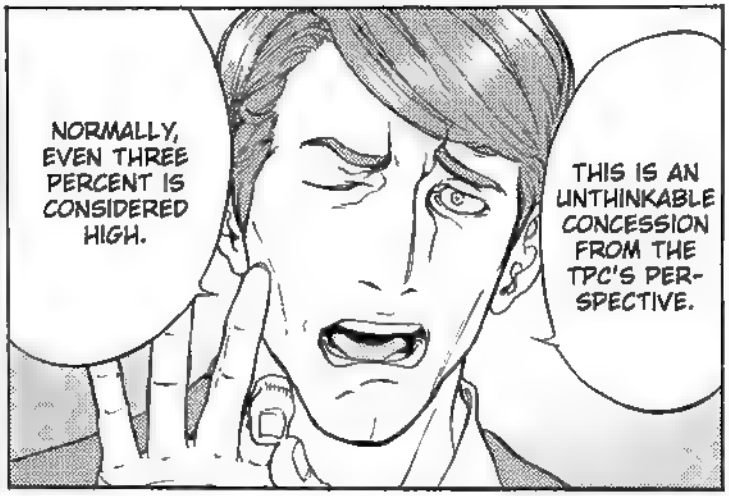
chapter 174


chapter 174

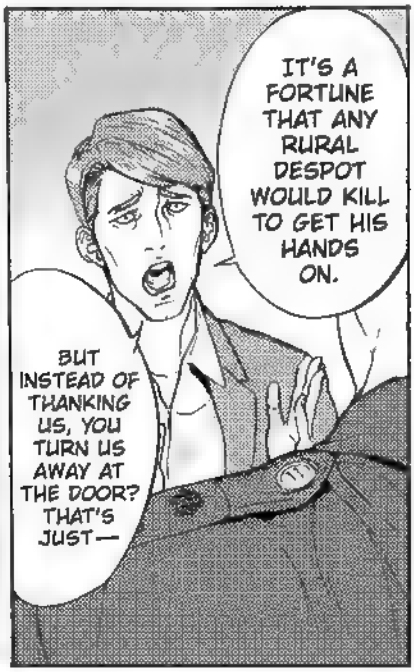
Until
Death
do us
Part

TEN PERCENT OF THE ENORMOUS WEALTH OUR FACTORY PRODUCES GOES INTO YOUR POCKET.
ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME, COLONEL?

SILENCE.

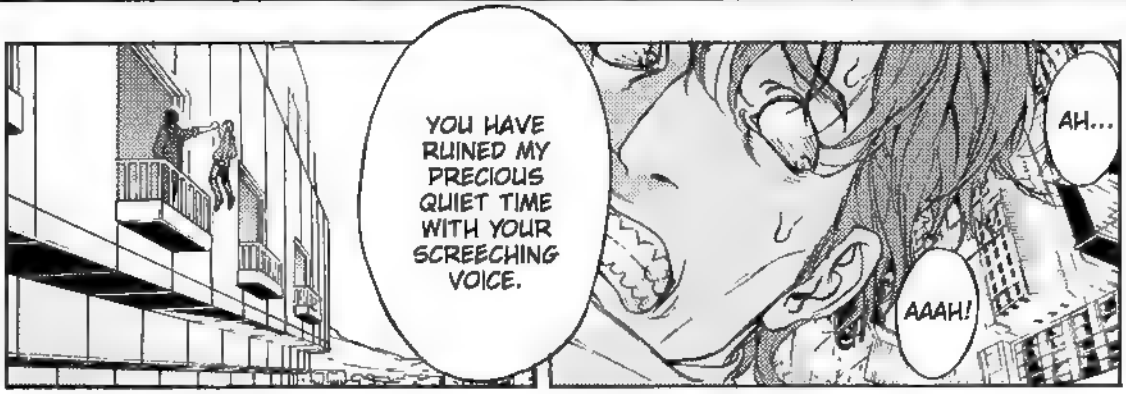

NORMALLY, EVEN THREE PERCENT IS CONSIDERED HIGH.
THIS IS AN UNTHINKABLE CONCESSION FROM THE TPC'S PERSPECTIVE.

SILENCE.


IT'S A FORTUNE THAT ANY RURAL DESPOT WOULD KILL TO GET HIS HANDS ON.
BUT INSTEAD OF THANKING US, YOU TURN US AWAY AT THE DOOR? THAT'S JUST—

???
(SWISH)
TAH

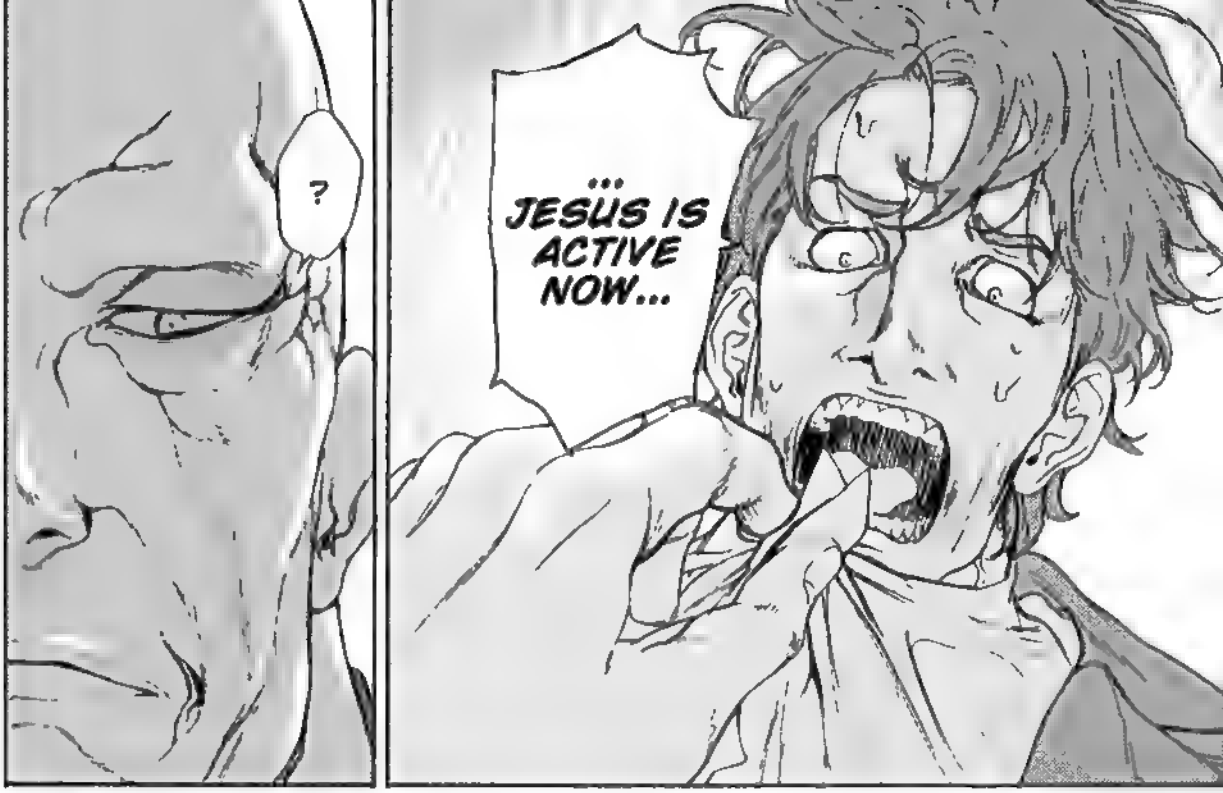
YOU HAVE SOME NERVE SPEAKING TO ME THAT WAY...
...WORM.

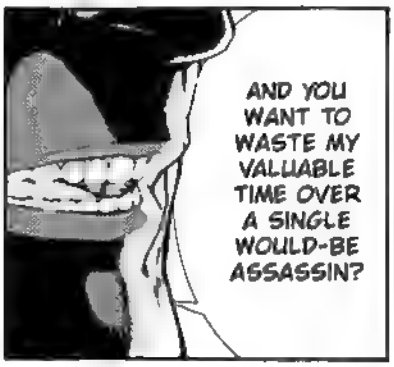

AH...
AAAH!
YOU HAVE RUINED MY PRECIOUS QUIET TIME WITH YOUR SCREECHING VOICE.

ピッ
PI

GULP.

YOUR LIFE IS NOT WORTH EVEN MY PINKY FINGER.
ピッ
PI (RIP)


?
...JESUS IS ACTIVE NOW...


AND YOU WANT TO WASTE MY VALUABLE TIME OVER A SINGLE WOULD-BE ASSASSIN?

IF HE IS NOT STOPPED, YOU WILL BE HELD RESPON-SIBLE FOR HIM...

JESUS, SWORN ENEMY OF THE TPC, HAS ENTERED ZIMBABWE.
WE BELIEVE HE SEEKS TO DESTROY OUR FACTORY.

NNN'
ピピピッ
YOUR DEDICATION TO YOUR WORK HAS EARNED YOU A REPRIEVE
ズッ
BUT REMEMBER THIS
AHHH!

SIR
SEND THE GIDO BATTERY TO THE FACTORY. ASSIGN A HEAD OF SECURITY

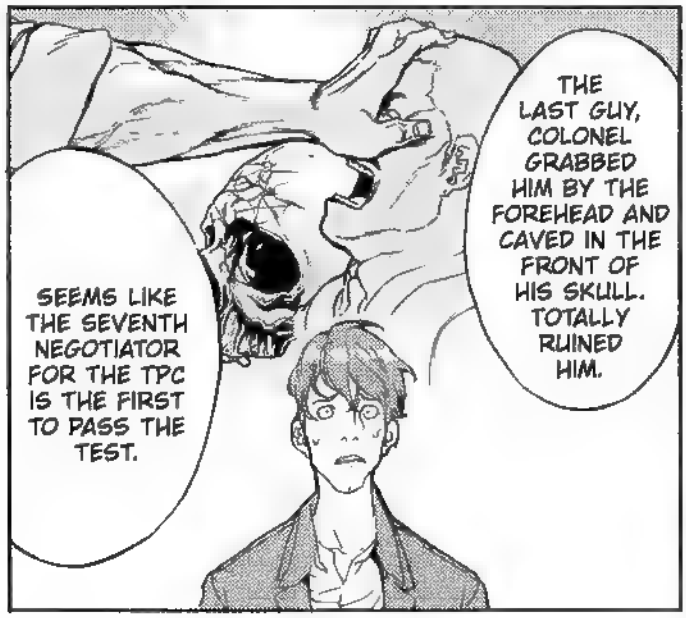
ANYONE WHO APPROACHES THE FACTORY WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION IS TO BE KILLED
SIR!

IN THIS COUNTRY MY ORDERS ARE ABSOLUTE
YOU WILL NOT DEFY MY WILL A SECOND TIME.

O-OF COURSE NOT.
YOUR SONS ARE KNOWN FAR AND WIDE AS THE FIERCEST AND BRAVEST WARRIORS AROUND.
I WILL DISPATCH ONE OF MY SONS. ANY COMPLAINTS!?
HMPH... THEY'RE IDIOTS, EACH AND EVERY ONE.
OH !?
ENOUGH. BEGONE.
YES, SIR!
ギィ (CREAK)

AHHH
...

IF YOU'D GIVEN IN TO THE FEAR OF FALLING AND GRABBED ONTO HIM, HE WOULD'VE RIPPED YOUR WRIST RIGHT OUT OF THE FOREARM.
YOU DID GOOD TO HOLD IT IN.
HUH?

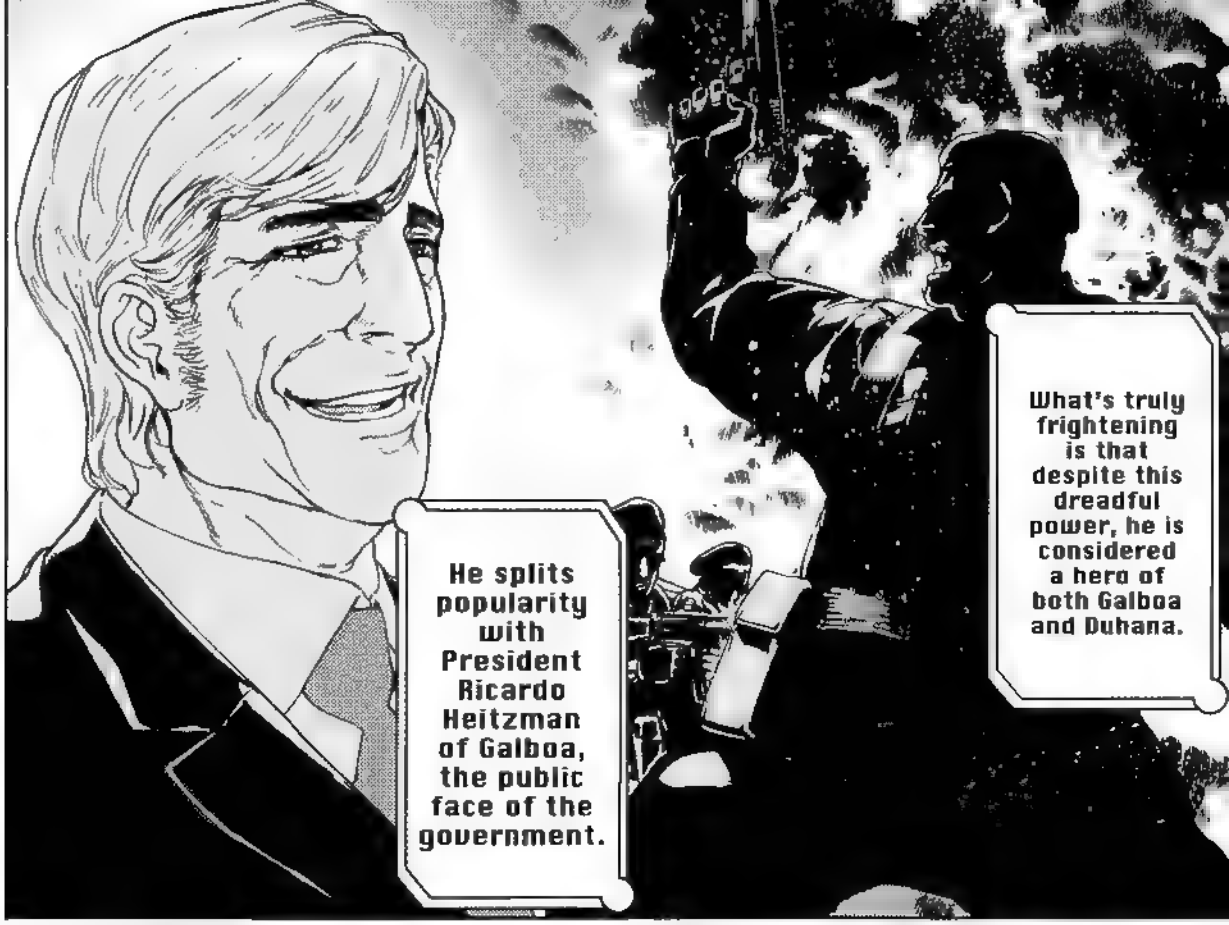

SEEMS LIKE THE SEVENTH NEGOTIATOR FOR THE TPC IS THE FIRST TO PASS THE TEST.
THE LAST GUY, COLONEL GRABBED HIM BY THE FOREHEAD AND CAVED IN THE FRONT OF HIS SKULL. TOTALLY RUINED HIM.

YOU'RE LUCKY. HE LIKES YOU MORE THAN THE OTHERS.

WHAT ABOUT... THE OTHER FIVE...?
KURU (SPIN)
...
FED TO THE TIGERS, SHOT OUT OF CANNONS ...
ACTUALLY, YOU DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY MORE THAN THAT.
UH...
.....

Are you aware of Tosa fighting dogs?
YES, BUT I'VE NEVER ACTUALLY SEEN ONE FIGHT.
Zashid Turus is a member of an ethnic group bred for combat dating back to the slave trade of the Middle Ages.
He is descended from those people, all these years later.
A man-made breed kept for fighting.
It's a cross between the Tosa breed from Shikoku and other breeds like Maeda, Mastiff, Bulldog, Pitbull, Great Dane, and others.
...over a period of well over a dozen generations.
For three centuries, they bred the most powerful slaves, black or white...

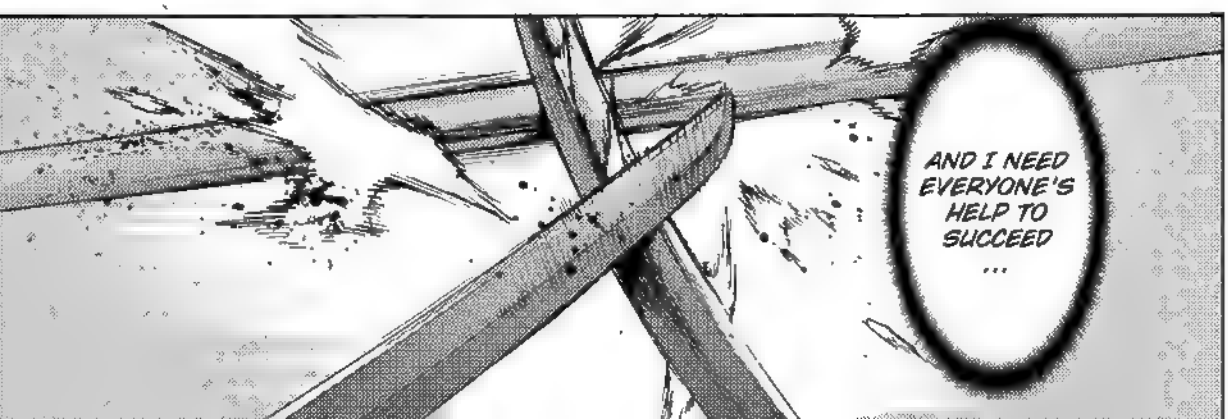
Most surprisingly, he has tattoo patterns on both sides of his body to mimic white and black skin, displaying his heritage for all to see.
6'2", 235 pounds. He looks overweight, but his estimated body fat is less than five percent.
His body is essentially one large mass of muscle.
...
Some of the stories about him would be unthinkable for any ordinary human being.
SPARC speaking
Reports on his personality are varied, but when composited...
...they paint a picture of a cold, cruel man of great physical strength and devilish cunning—a born dictator.


He splits popularity with President Ricardo Heitzman of Galboa, the public face of the government.
What's truly frightening is that despite this dreadful power, he is considered a hero of both Galboa and Duhana.

The more advanced countries detest the man, but to the citizens, he is a hero who protected their land from colonial rule.
He's an effective leader.
Their commitment to "might makes right" has taken tiny Galboa to U.N. membership, thanks to their military power.

MY DUTY IS TO SUBDUE MAMORU-SAN AND BRING HIM SAFELY BACK TO JAPAN!
Public support of the government is over eighty percent, at least among those with the right to vote.
This is in large part thanks to him.

I MUSTN'T LET MAMORU-SAN CONTACT COL. ZASHID TURUS!!

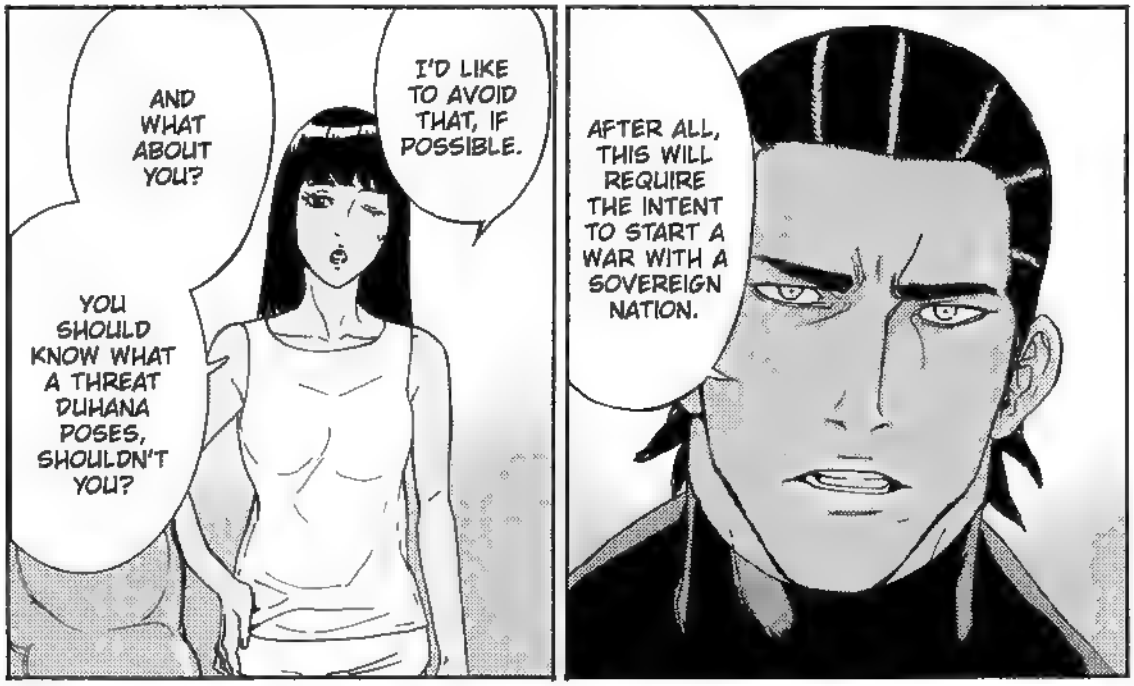

AND I NEED EVERYONE'S HELP TO SUCCEED ...

GA
(WHAK)
GA
GA
GA
GA
GA
GA

SHAAA (FSHHH)
シャアアア
SHAAA
シャアアア

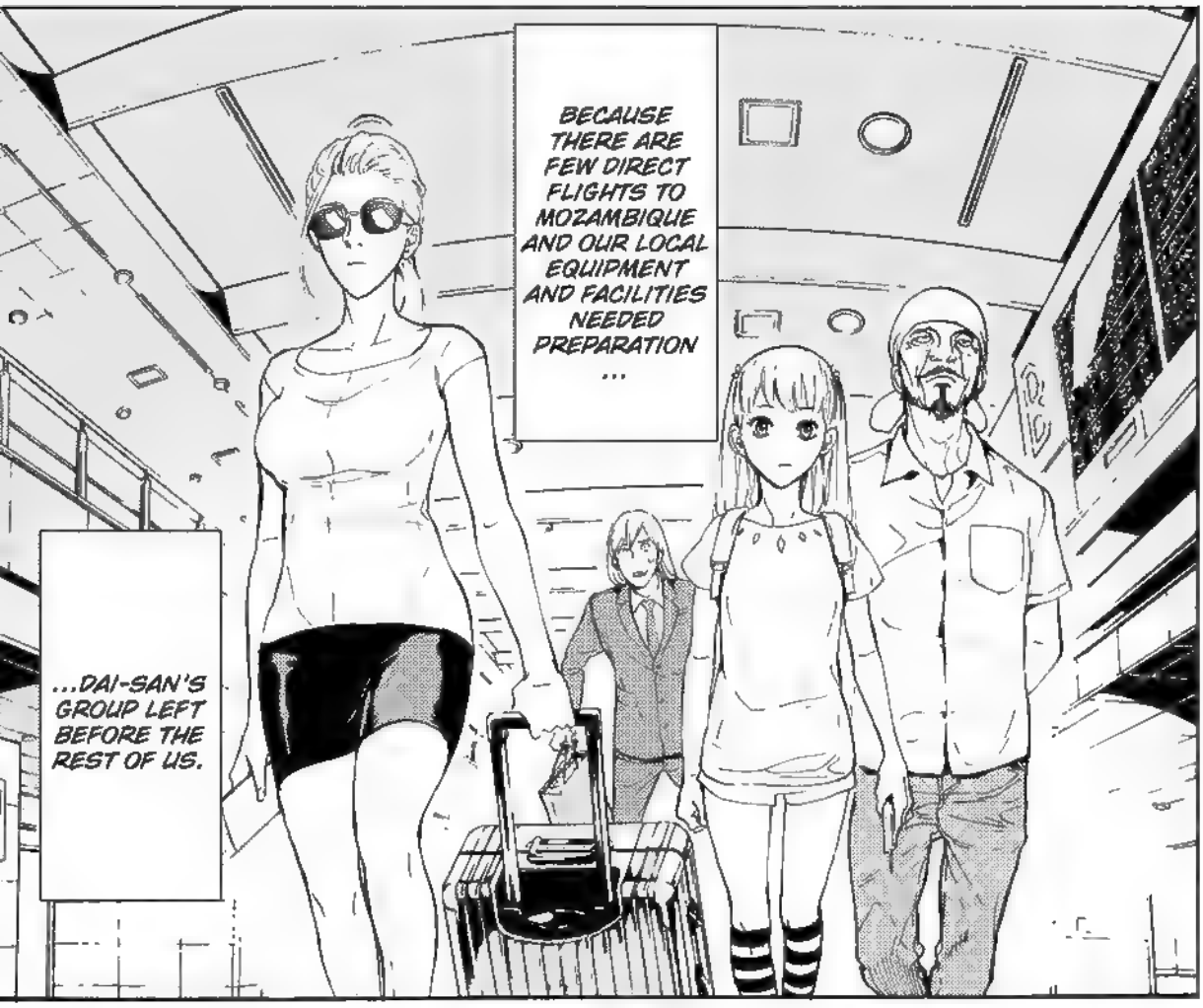
I WOULDN'T JUDGE HIM BASED ON HIS APPEARANCE.
GUY COULD USE SOME DISCIPLINE...
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
GU (HRP)
BETWEEN THE ELECTRONICS AND THE SHOCK-ABSORBING GEL, THAT SUIT ALONE WEIGHS 125 POUNDS.
MOST PEOPLE CAN BARELY MOVE WEARING SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
IT'S HEAVY!
ZUSHI (ZMMF)

GOTCHA...
YOU NEED SKILL LIKE THAT TO SURVIVE THE JOB WE'RE ABOUT TO DO.
THAT'S THE ONLY WAY TO STOP AN ASSAULT RIFLE BULLET WHILE ON A MOTOR-CYCLE, AND YOU WOULDN'T EXPECT ANYONE TO BE QUICK IN THE SADDLE.
BUT THE IDIOT HAS THE STAMINA AND TECHNIQUE TO PULL IT OFF WITH EASE. IT'S WHY HE WAS GRANTED USE OF BUCEPHALUS.


AND WHAT ABOUT YOU?
I'D LIKE TO AVOID THAT, IF POSSIBLE.
YOU SHOULD KNOW WHAT A THREAT DUHANA POSES, SHOULDN'T YOU?
AFTER ALL, THIS WILL REQUIRE THE INTENT TO START A WAR WITH A SOVEREIGN NATION.

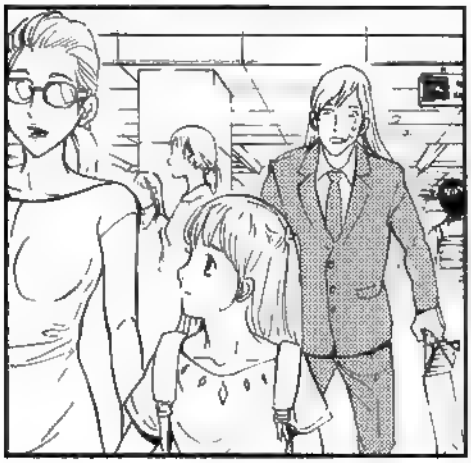
I DON'T SEE ANY REASON TO HIDE IT. I FLED THE COUNTRY WHEN DUHANA SPLIT OFF.
IT'S PART OF WHY I WAS CHOSEN FOR THIS OPERATION.
YEAH. I WAS ONCE A MEMBER OF THE BLACK UNIT.
HUH!?
THAT'S REASSURING TO KNOW.
SO YOU'VE GOT YOUR OWN STORY, JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE...

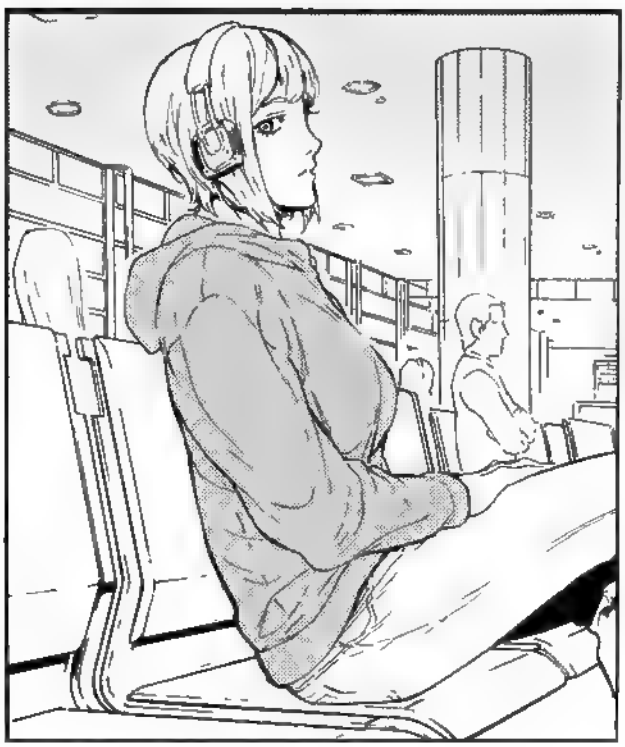
NARITA INTL. AIRPORT
Narita Airport Terminal 1

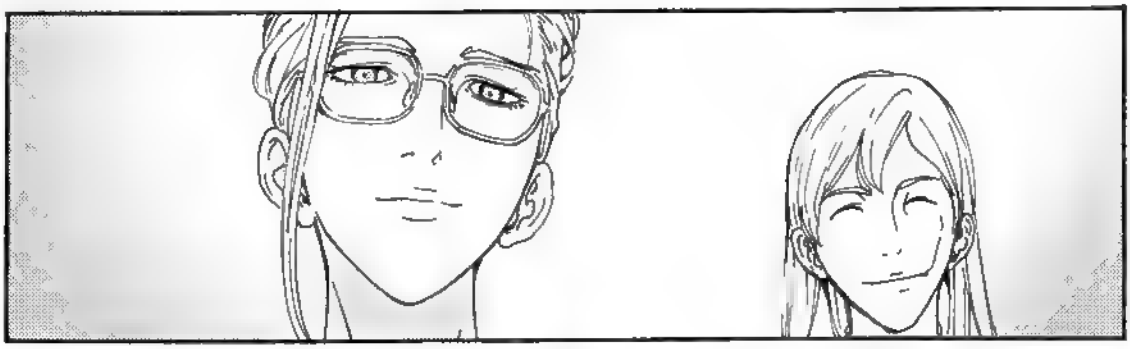

BECAUSE THERE ARE FEW DIRECT FLIGHTS TO MOZAMBIQUE AND OUR LOCAL EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES NEEDED PREPARATION ...
...DAI-SAN'S GROUP LEFT BEFORE THE REST OF US.

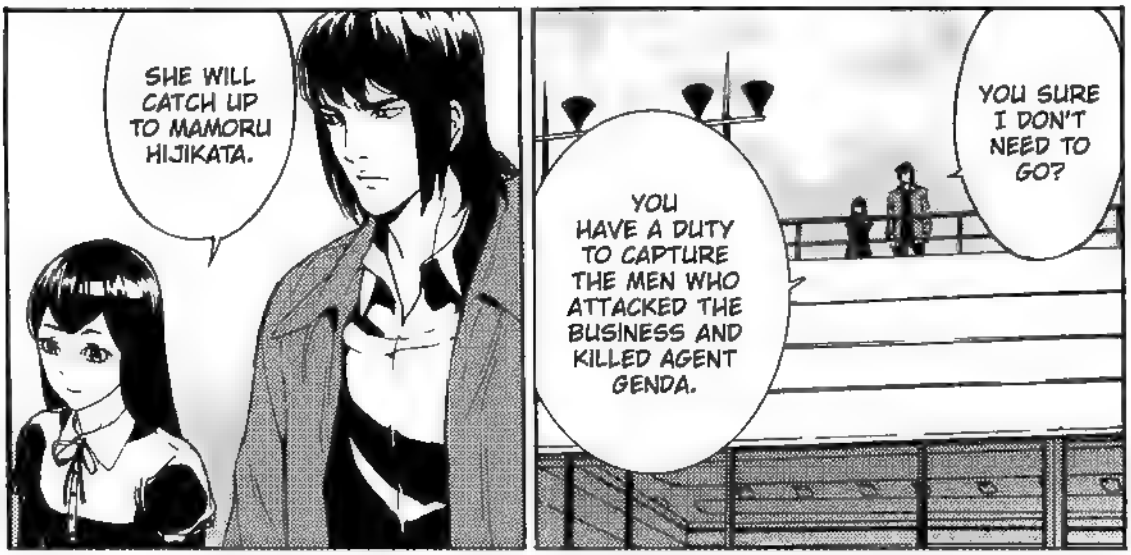
...BUT ULTIMATELY, MAMORU-SAN AND WISEMAN'S PLAN WAS INDECIPHER-ABLE, AND I COULDN'T FORESEE ANYTHING BUT THE VAGUEST NOTIONS.
WE WENT OVER OUR PREDICTIONS WITH A FINE-TOOTHED COMB UNTIL THE VERY LAST MOMENT...

IT MUST BE THE PRESENCE OF MAMORU-SAN'S COMPANIONS WITH THE INVISIBILITY GEAR THAT ARE THROWING OFF MY SENSES.





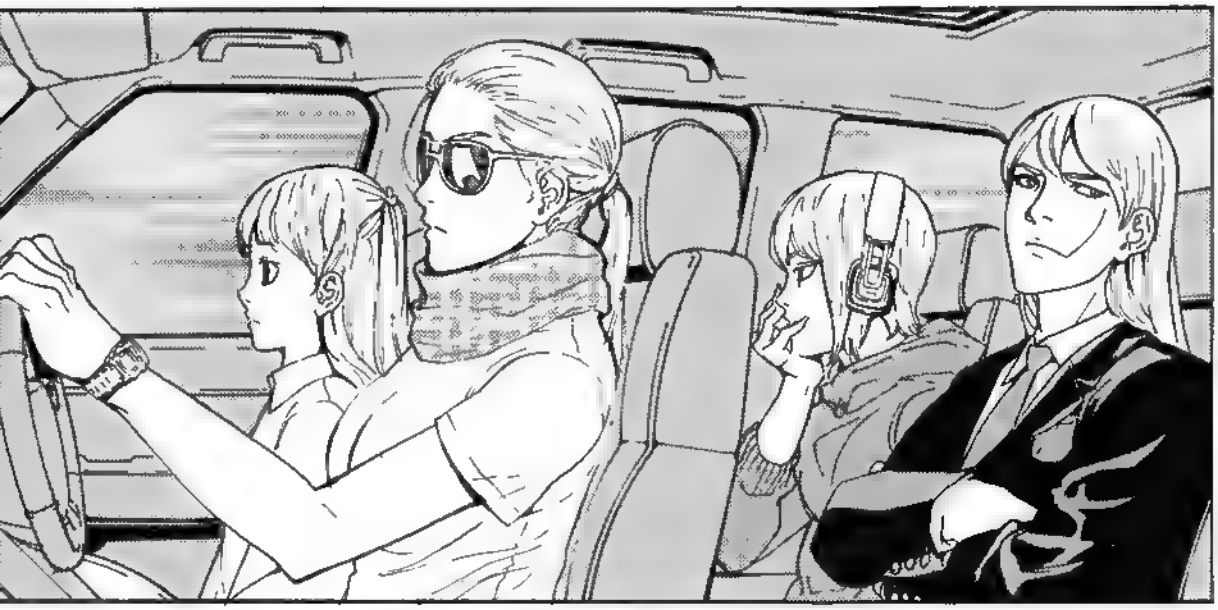


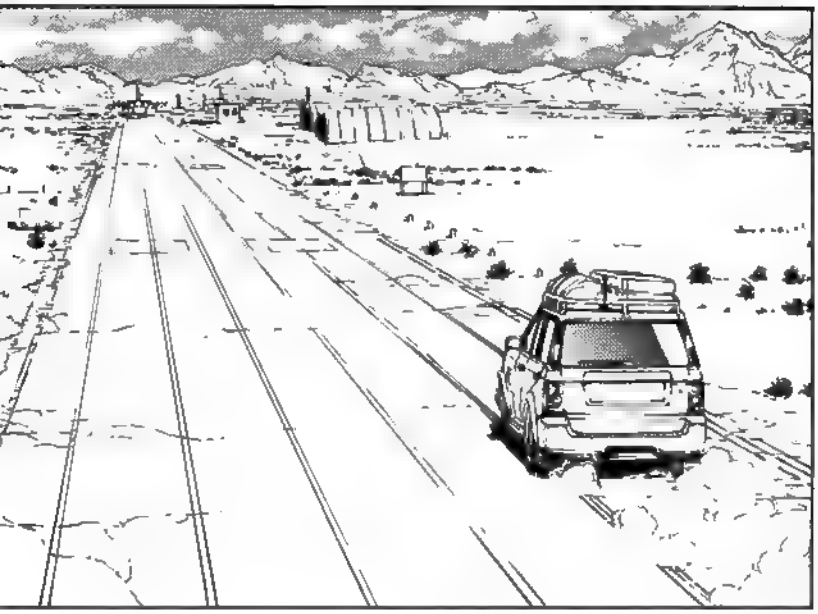

SHE WILL CATCH UP TO MAMORU HIJIKATA.
YOU HAVE A DUTY TO CAPTURE THE MEN WHO ATTACKED THE BUSINESS AND KILLED AGENT GENDA.
YOU SURE I DON'T NEED TO GO?

...
WAS IT HER PROPHETIC FORESIGHT?
HOW CAN YOU TELL?
JUST FEMALE INTUITION.
AHA
JAL

Until
Death
do us
Part

chapter 175





YOU DON'T NEED ANY?

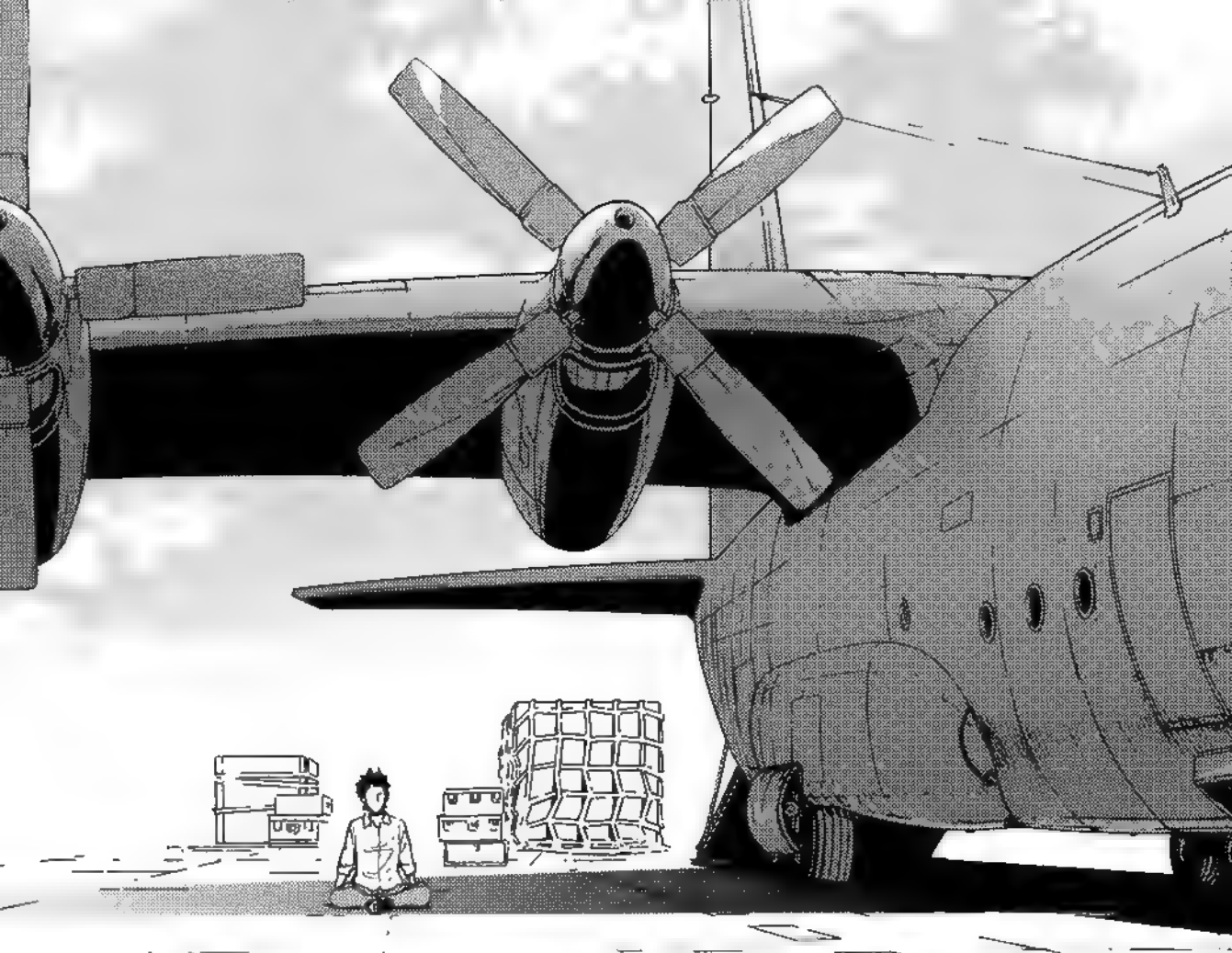
I KEEP MINE ON ME AT ALL TIMES.

OH... FINE.

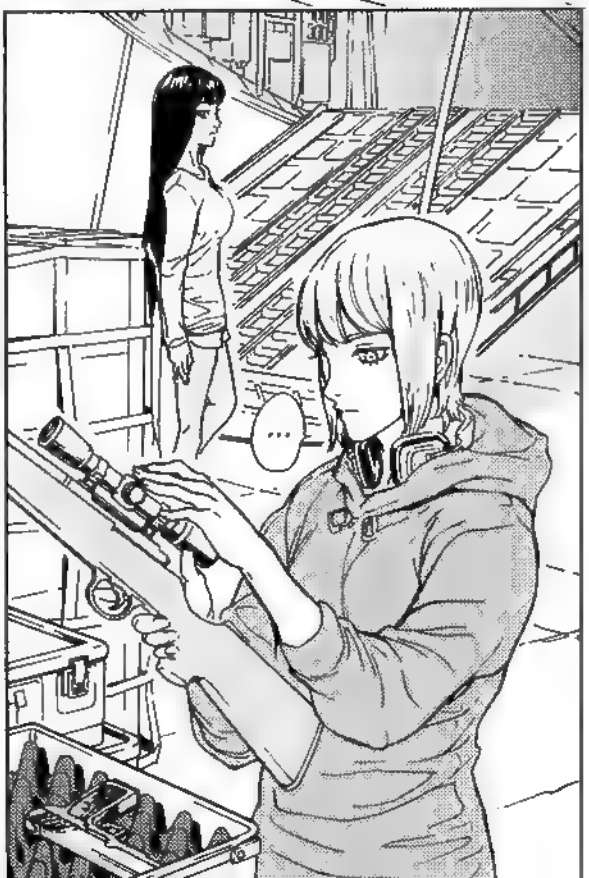
...

SO YOU FINALLY SHOWED UP.

SO YOU FINALLY SHOWED UP.

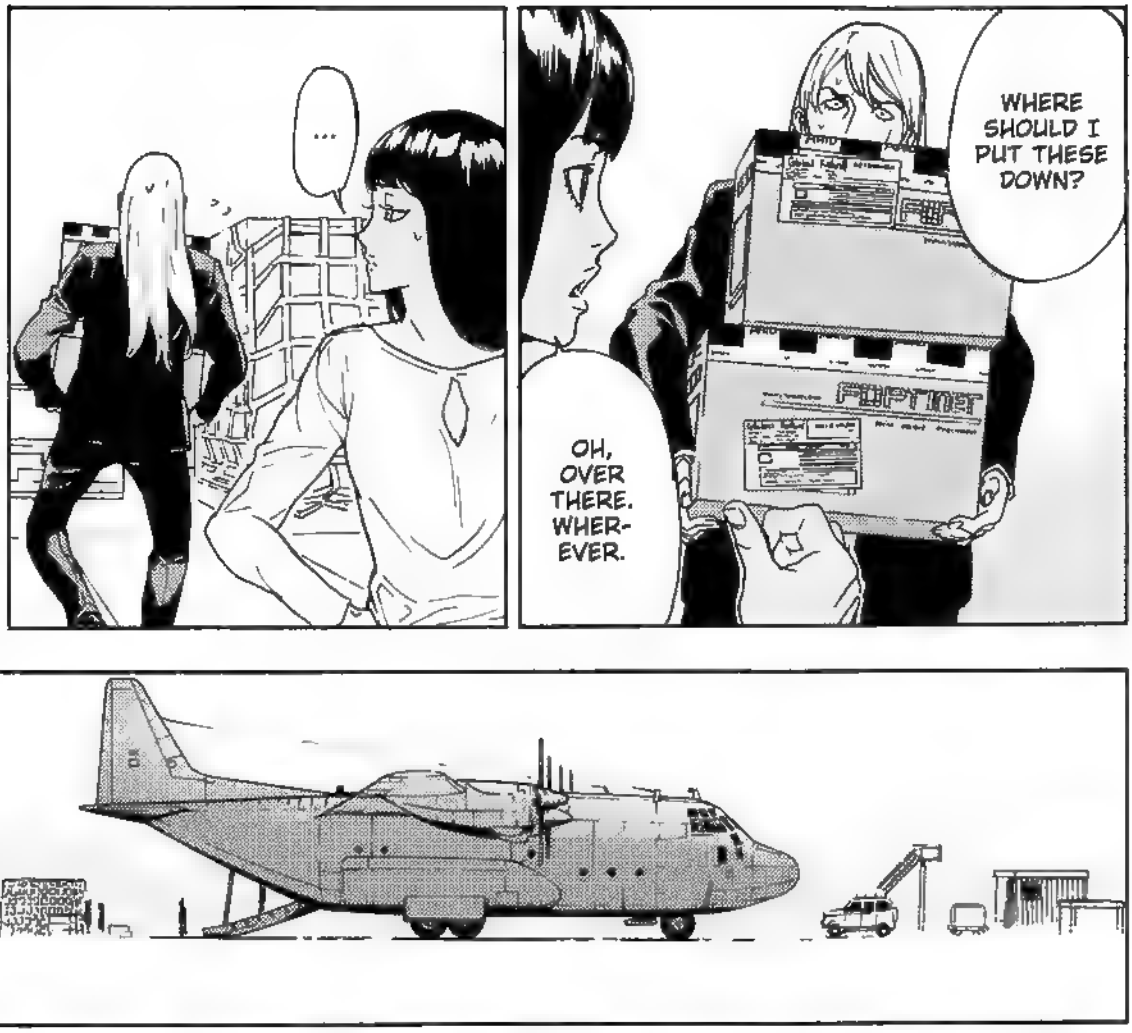


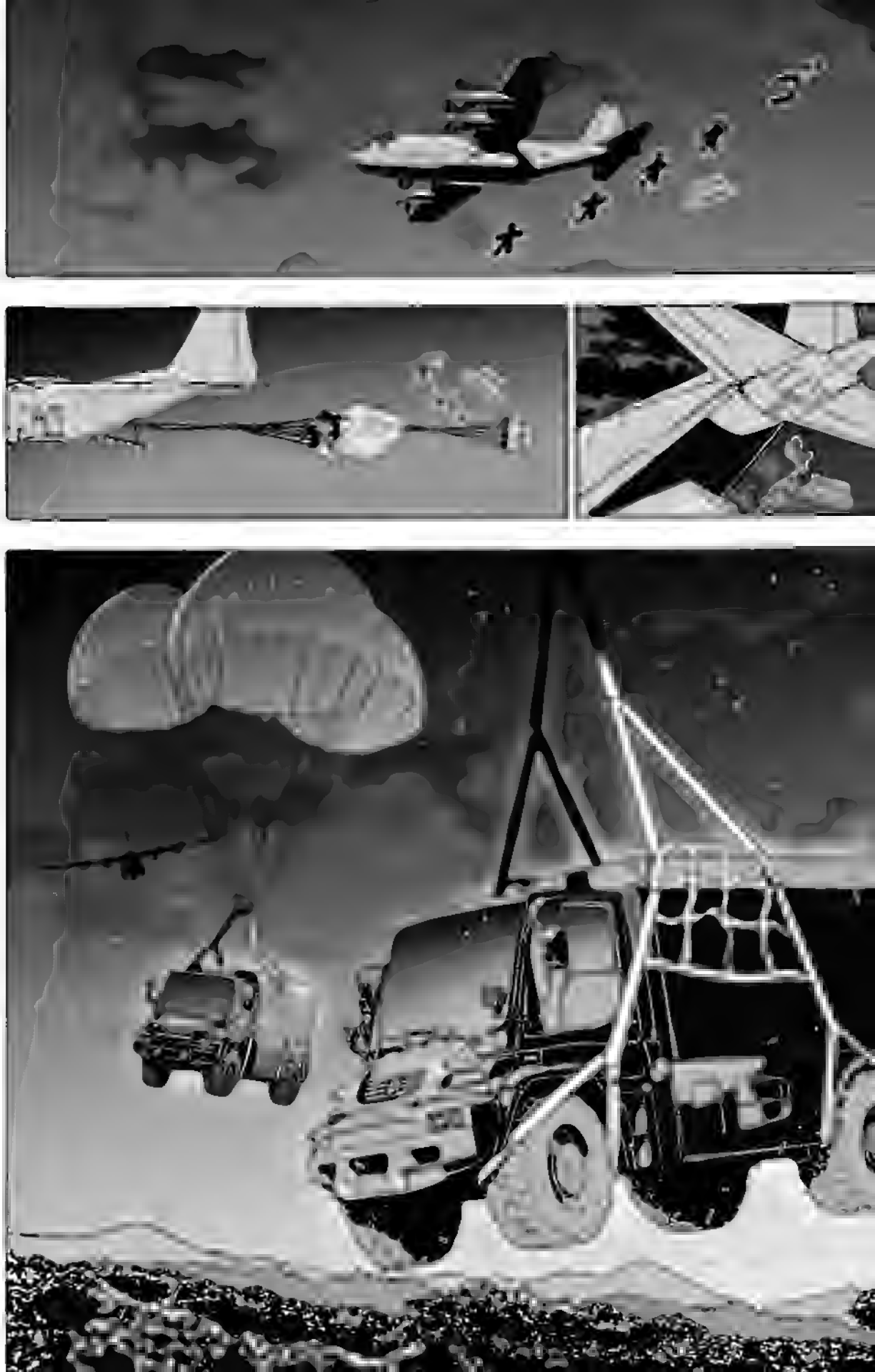
YOU DON'T NEED ANY?


...

I KEEP MINE ON ME AT ALL TIMES.
OH... FINE.

IF YOU HAVE ANY WARNINGS OR CONCERNS, I'D LIKE TO HEAR THEM.
OUR PREPARATIONS ARE 99% COMPLETE.
THE REST IS UP TO YOU. WE CAN CROSS THE BORDER AT ANY TIME.
DUHANA DOESN'T HAVE A REAL AIR FORCE, BUT I'D STILL RECOMMEND NOT INVADING DURING THE DAY.
THEY DO HAVE SOMETHING OF A LAND PRESENCE ALONG THE BORDER.
I'D RECOMMEND LEAVING AT A TIME OF DAY WHERE WE WON'T BE SPOTTED FROM THE GROUND.
...
THIS PLANE BELONGS TO A SMUGGLER WHO TRADES IN DUHANA.
THE CRAFT ITSELF WON'T COME UNDER SUSPICION, BUT THAT DOESN'T HOLD TRUE FOR ALL OF US.
UNDERSTOOD.
THEN LET'S LEAVE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT. I'LL LET YOU DECIDE THE BEST HOUR.


...
WHERE SHOULD I PUT THESE DOWN?
OH, OVER THERE. WHER-EVER.



JACKPOT!

I've spotted them.
SPARC

KOKU (NOD)
...
ALL ACCORDING TO PLAN?
RIGHT.
BEGIN SUPPRES-SION!!
BAN! (BOOM)

CHA (CLICK)
HMM?
WHA!?
AAAH!

バス
WH-WHAT'S THAT!?
WHAT'S GOING ON!?
ギュルル
EEP!
WHA—!?

AND NOW...
モゾ
AN AMBUSH!?
WHAT WAS THAT!?
HEY! GET US OUTTA HERE!
ヒュゴ
!?
WHO ARE YOU!?

ズガ
ドガ
ドド
ドド
WHA—
チャ

ヒュン
ヒュン
ヒュン
ドズ
ドズ
ドズ
!?
AREN'T YOU—?
DON'T MOVE!

WE HAVE FULLY DISARMED YOUR CAMP.
IF YOU DO NOT COMPLY WITH OUR DEMANDS...
BAN! (WHAM)

ボッ
BO (WHOOM)
...WE WILL FORCE YOU TO DO SO.
チャッ
CHA (CHK)
THERE ARE TWO PATROL-MEN ON THE RIGHT, SENJI-SAN.
!?

Provide backup, Ashe-san.
I don't want them hurt. Miss as close as you can.
I HEAR AND OBEY!
HUH—?
IS THAT —!?

GAKH!!
YOU'RE MINE !!
GWAAH!
WHUH !?
RRGH
WILL THAT DO, MISS?
YES!

キキッ
???
ガチャッ

BUT IF WE MADE CONTACT NORMALLY, WE DETERMINED IT WOULD RESULT IN A FIREFIGHT. THEREFORE, SLIGHTLY ROUGHER MEANS WERE NECESSARY.

I'M SORRY, EVERY ONE

?

I APOLOGIZE FOR HAVING TO TAKE THESE MEASURES AGAINST YOU.

BUT IF WE MADE CONTACT NORMALLY, WE DETERMINED IT WOULD RESULT IN A FIREFIGHT. THEREFORE, SLIGHTLY ROUGHER MEANS WERE NECESSARY.

I'M SORRY, EVERY-ONE.

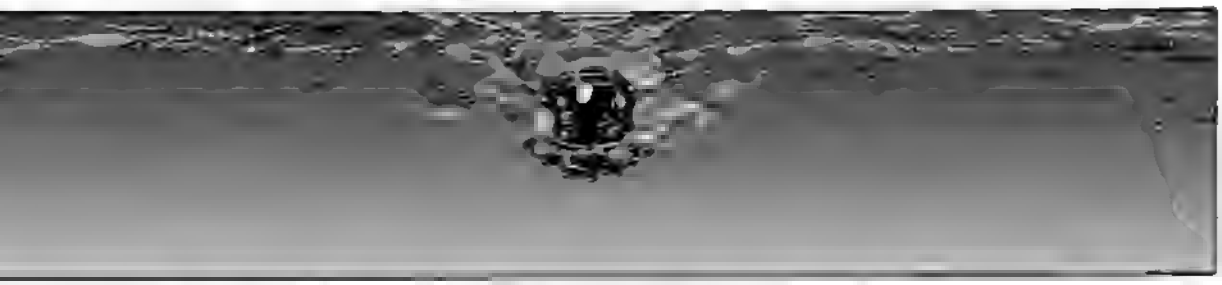
?

I APOLOGIZE FOR HAVING TO TAKE THESE MEASURES AGAINST YOU.

ARE YOU MEMBERS OF THE DUHANA LIBERATION FRONT?
ER...
YES, THAT'S US.

CAN WE ASK FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE?

???



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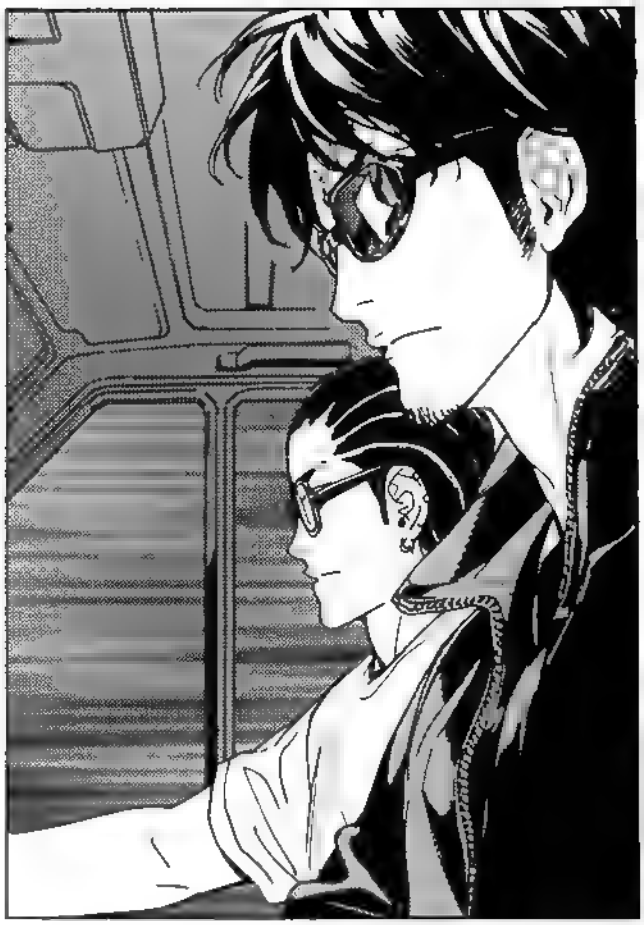

Until
Death
do us
Part

YES.
YOU EXPECT ME TO BELIEVE THIS?
YES.
AND YOU WANT US TO HELP YOU, WHEN WE HAVE NO CONNECTION TO THIS MAN?
...I DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO RESPOND ...
...

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chapter 176

WE'RE HERE, NEXT TO THE INLAND BORDER. GOT THAT?
HERE IN THIS SWAMPY REGION, THE BORDER AND INTERIOR SECURITY...
DUHANA
...ARE MANAGED BY TAUS OF THE TURUS FAMILY. HE IS OUR DIRECT OPPONENT.
...
IN THE BARREN HIGHLANDS CLOSER TO THE CAPITAL IS GIDO.
ALONG THE SEA NEAR THE CAPITAL IS EDGE, AND FURTHER UP THE COAST IS MISALT.
THESE FOUR MEN ARE THE CLOSEST TO BEING ZASHID'S HEIR.
タウス
TAUS
DUHANA
ミサルト
MISALT
ギド
GIDO
ZOTT
エシ
EDGE
GALBOA
sea

EACH OF THEM CONTROLS ABOUT THREE TO FOUR THOUSAND MEN. THAT'S ABOUT HALF THE COUNTRY'S FORCES IN TOTAL.

THERE ARE THAT MANY SIBLINGS?
THE OTHERS ARE NON-COMBATANTS OR WOMEN— ESSENTIALLY NO MORE THAN CIVILIANS.
THERE ARE OTHER BROTHERS IN VARIOUS ASSIGNMENTS AND LOCATIONS
BUT THE MOST IMPORTANT POSTS BELONG TO JENIE AND FEN.

HIS "WIFE" IS ONLY FOR PUBLIC PURPOSES. HE HAS AT LEAST THIRTY OF THEM, AND OVER A HUNDRED CHILDREN, I'VE HEARD
IT MEANS THAT GENETICS EXIST TO CREATE THE STRONGEST POSSIBLE OFFSPRING
SOME HAVE GREAT STRENGTH; SOME, GREAT INTELLIGENCE, SOME, SWIFT SPEED. IT IS A MIX OF MANY BLOODLINES
THEY'RE A LINE OF MONSTERS THAT EXIST TO TEST ALL POSSIBILITIES
AND YOU STILL INTEND TO CHALLENGE HIM?
OUR FOE IS A GREAT AND TERRIBLE MONSTER
THAT IS HOW ZASHID TURUS WAS CREATED

IN EXCHANGE FOR YOUR COOPERATION ...
...WE WILL OFFER TO DEFEAT TAUS OURSELVES.
...
SU (SHH)
ズッ
IS THIS ACCEPT-ABLE?
...VERY WELL...

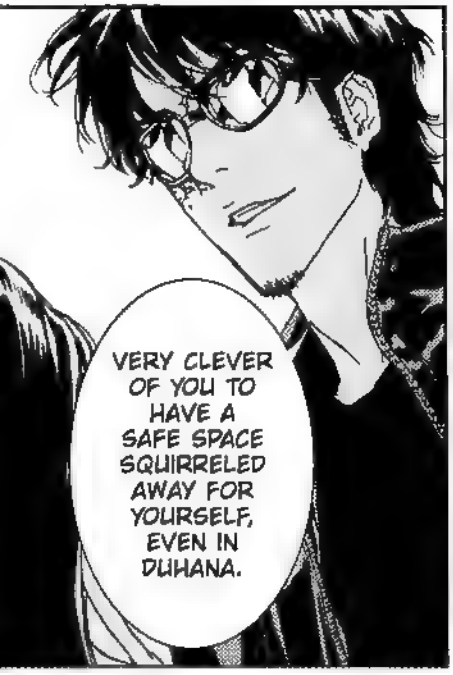
.....
F-FINE...
BUT THERE MUST BE NO KILLING.
AFTER SEIZING HIM, HE WILL BE PUT TO A FAIR TRIAL. THAT IS MY CONDITION.
...

"DON'T KILL HIM," SHE SAYS...
ONCE SHE SEES TAUS FOR HERSELF, SHE'LL UNDERSTAND WHAT THE SONS OF A MONSTER ARE LIKE.

オオオ゛

BATAN (SLAM)
BUOO (VRRMM)
HAUL HIM OUT!!
DOSA (THUMP)
HRGH!

I-IS THIS—!?


VERY CLEVER OF YOU TO HAVE A SAFE SPACE SQUIRRELED AWAY FOR YOURSELF, EVEN IN DUHANA.

DOSA (THUMP)
ドサ
YOUR HIDDEN VILLA, RIGHT IN THE MIDST OF THE REGION YOU COMMANDED.

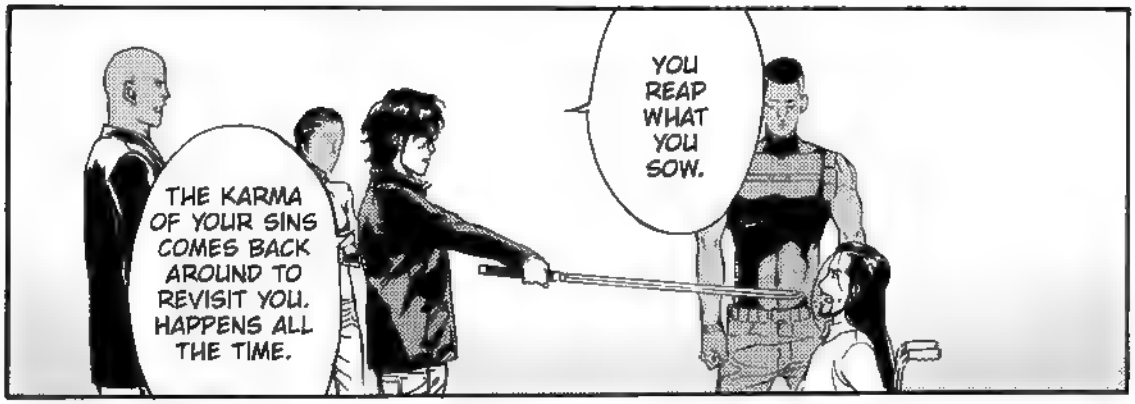
THAT'S RIGHT.
GUI (TUG)
グイ

WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH BY BRINGING ME HERE!?
YOU'RE GOING TO LEAD A REBELLION.
WHAT !?
THIS WILL BE THE INITIATION OF OUR PLAN.
ONE OF ZASHID TURUS'S HEIRS ESCAPES HIS EXECUTION AND BITES BACK AGAINST HIS FATHER'S HAND TO SAVE HIS OWN LIFE.

YOUR WILL DOESN'T ENTER INTO IT.
THE WAR THAT'S ABOUT TO KICK OFF WITHIN DUHANA WILL ALL REST ON YOUR SHOULDERS.
I-I REFUSE!
I COULD NEVER DO SOMETHING LIKE THAT TO MY DAD!!
THIS IS WHY YOU DIDN'T WANT ME TO BE ARRESTED IN JAPAN, ISN'T IT!?
NOW I GET IT!
!?
YEP! YOU HAVE TO GO MISSING, OR ELSE YOU'VE GOT AN ALIBI.

HOW ABOUT ...
...UNTIL YOU REGRET THAT YOU WERE EVER BORN?
YOU SADIS-TIC...
HOW ...
HOW MUCH MUST I SUFFER ...
... BEFORE YOU ARE SATIS-FIED?
FUC—
CHA (CHK)

THIS IS THE RESULT OF YOUR ACTIONS THAT DAMAGED THE LIFE OF A YOUNG GIRL!
THIS IS NO JOKE. I AM DEADLY SERIOUS.
.....


THE KARMA OF YOUR SINS COMES BACK AROUND TO REVISIT YOU. HAPPENS ALL THE TIME.
YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW.

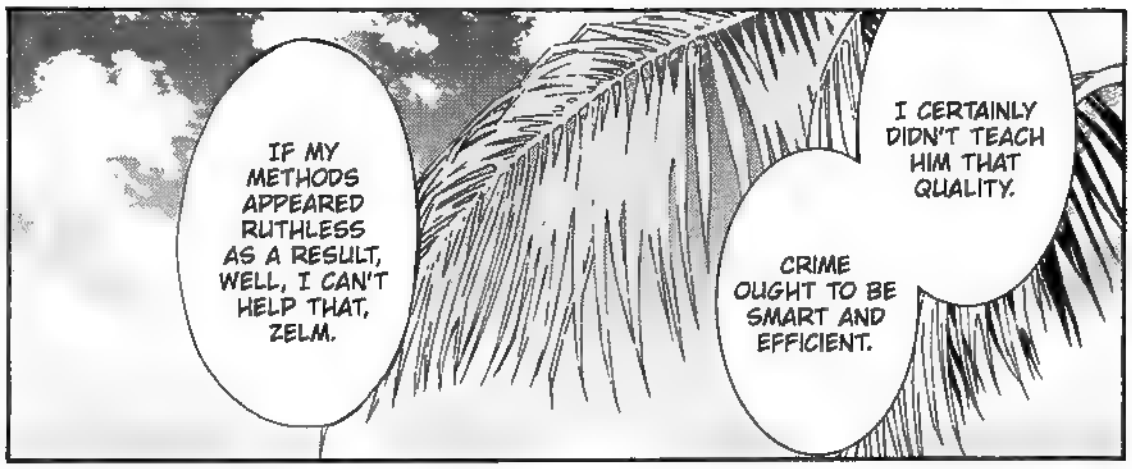
I'LL REPEAT— YOU ARE THE ONE WHO TOYED WITH HARUKA'S FATE.
...WH-WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE NOW... GOD?

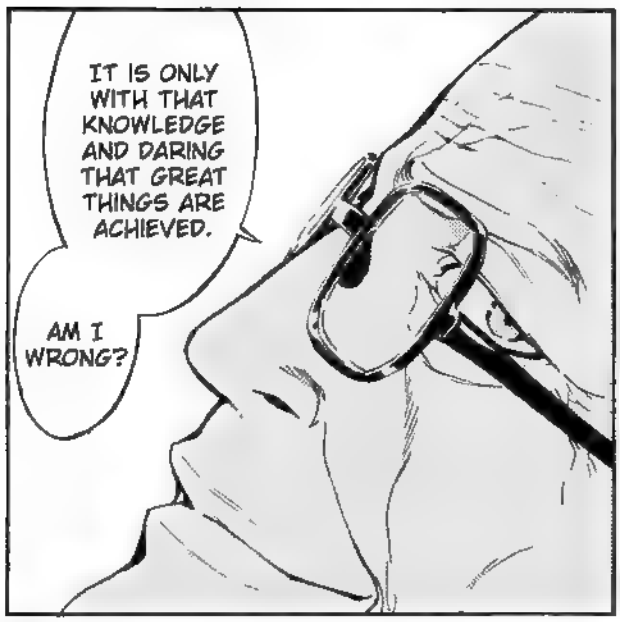
DID YOU THINK THAT JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE THE SON OF A TYRANT THAT RUINING THE LIVES OF OTHERS WOULD NEVER COME BACK TO AFFECT YOU?
FUCK ME? FUCK YOU!
WHAT, THERE'S MORE!?
NEXT.

OF COURSE THERE'S MORE. YOU'RE STILL ALIVE, AREN'T YOU!?
...

IT FIGURES THAT THIS PLACE'S INTERNET FUNCTIONALITY IS UTTER SHIT...
LET'S SEE...
THAT'S THE CAMERAS AND THE EDITING EQUIPMENT.
DOSA (THUMP)
IT'S ALMOST CRUEL IN ITS RUTHLESS-NESS...
KNOWING THIS, THE PLAN IS TO PUSH HIM AS FAR AS HE'LL GO.
BUT EDGE HAS TOO MUCH PRIDE TO CHOOSE DEATH FOR HIMSELF.

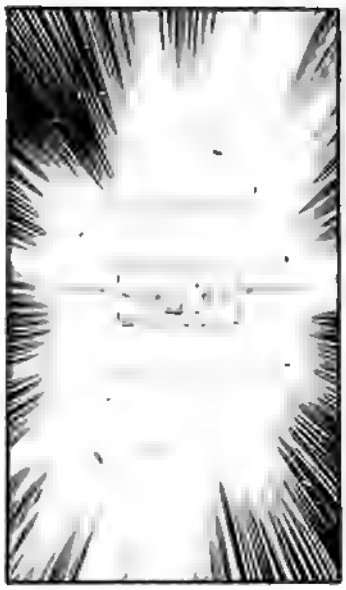
THIS HAPPENED TO HIM BECAUSE HE DABBLED IN SADISTIC CRUELTY FOR FUN.
AREN'T YOU HIS FORMER MENTOR?


IF MY METHODS APPEARED RUTHLESS AS A RESULT, WELL, I CAN'T HELP THAT, ZELM.
I CERTAINLY DIDN'T TEACH HIM THAT QUALITY.
CRIME OUGHT TO BE SMART AND EFFICIENT.

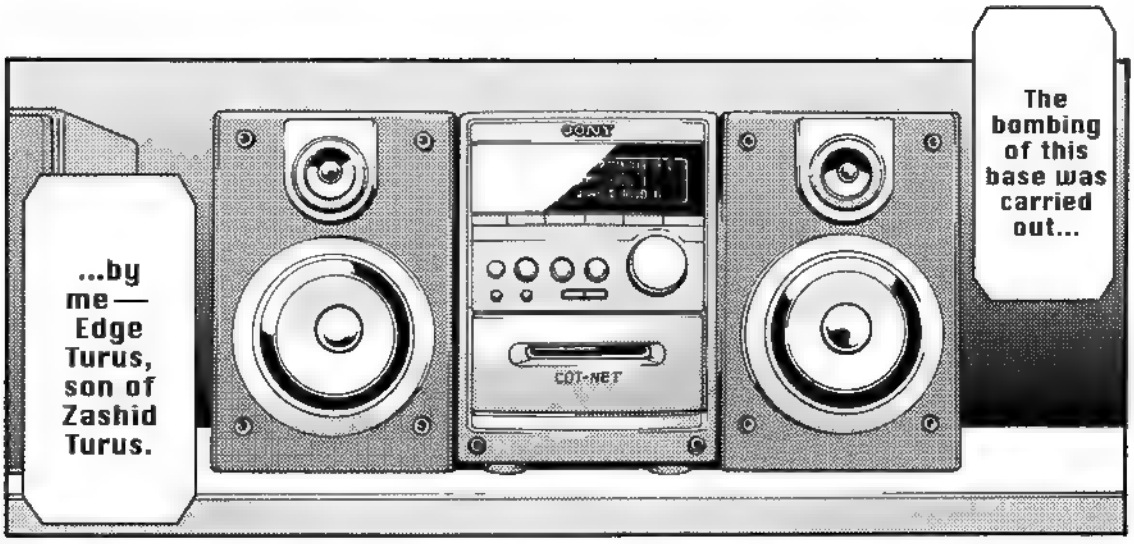

IT IS ONLY WITH THAT KNOWLEDGE AND DARING THAT GREAT THINGS ARE ACHIEVED.
AM I WRONG?

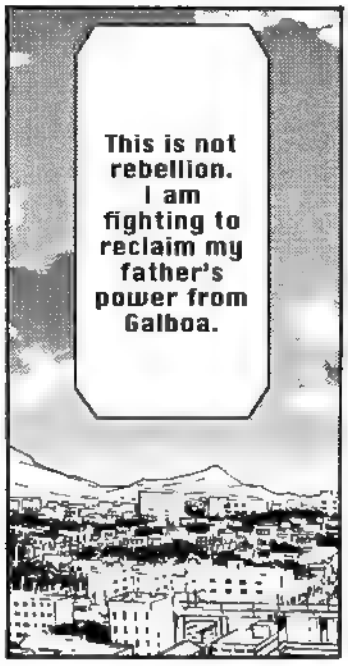
WE MUST ASSUME THAT ALL OF OUR ACTIONS WILL COME BACK TO US.
ONE INSTANCE REVEALS ALL.

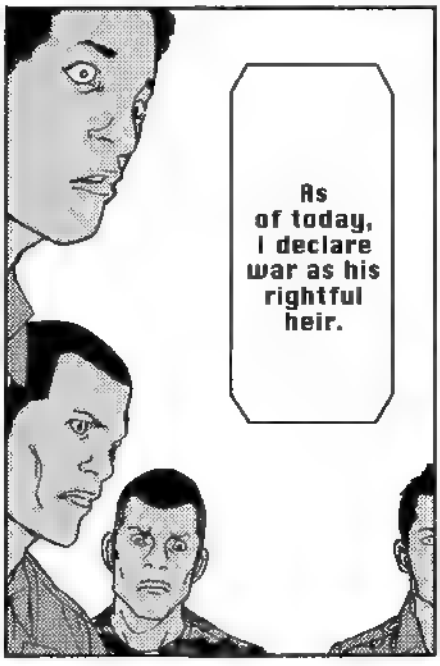
...
BUT I DON'T THINK SPOILED LITTLE EDGE WILL EVER UNDERSTAND THAT.
YA KNOW?
AS ANOTHER FORMER PUPIL, IT HURTS TO WATCH.



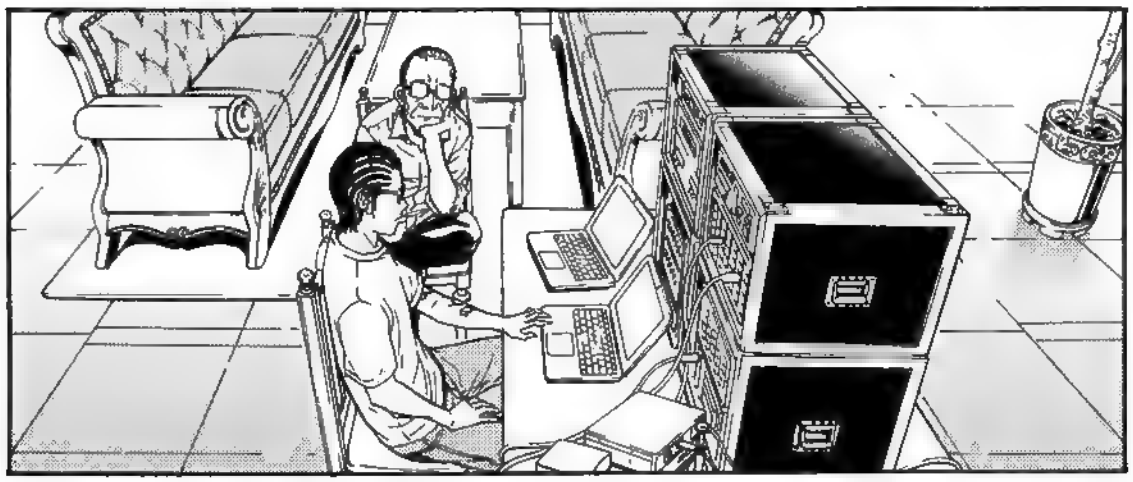
DOGAA (KABOOM)


...by me— Edge Turus, son of Zashid Turus.
SONY
CDT-NET
The bombing of this base was carried out...


This is not rebellion. I am fighting to reclaim my father's power from Galboa.

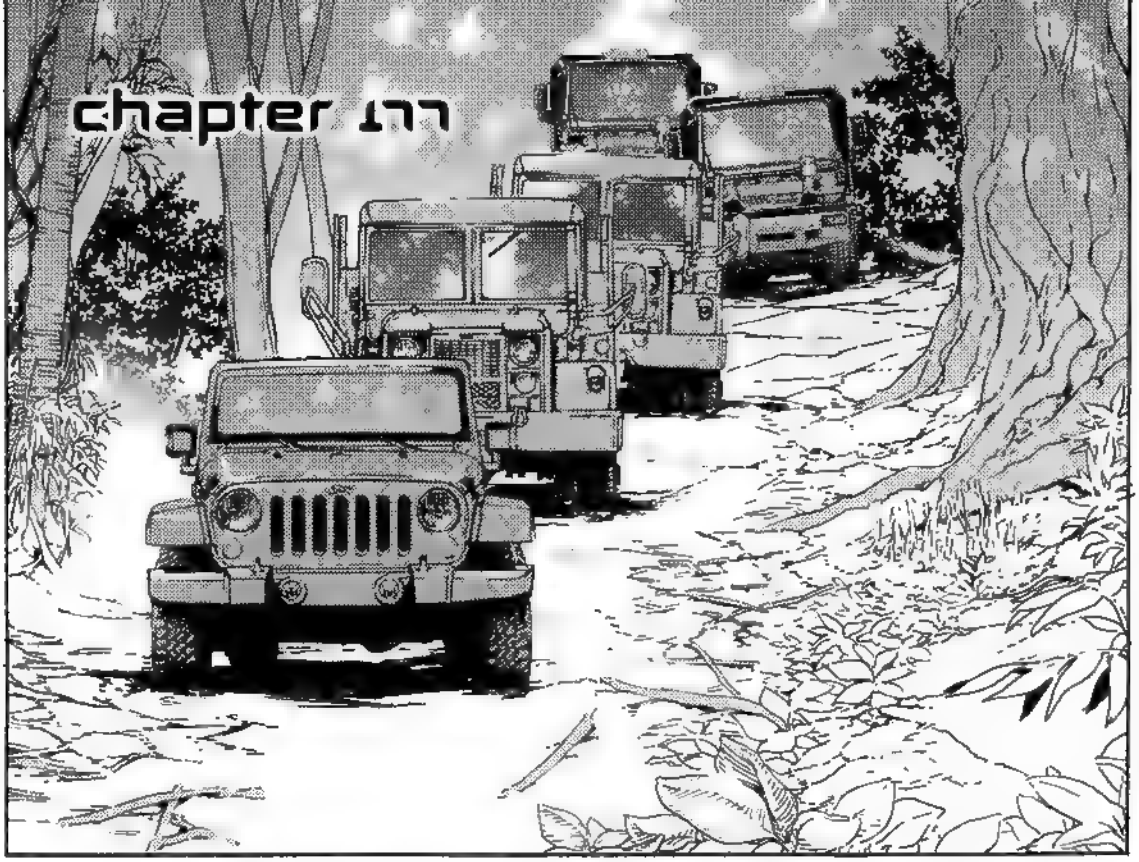

As of today, I declare war as his rightful heir.

In order to return power from the corrupt regime to the people and my father.

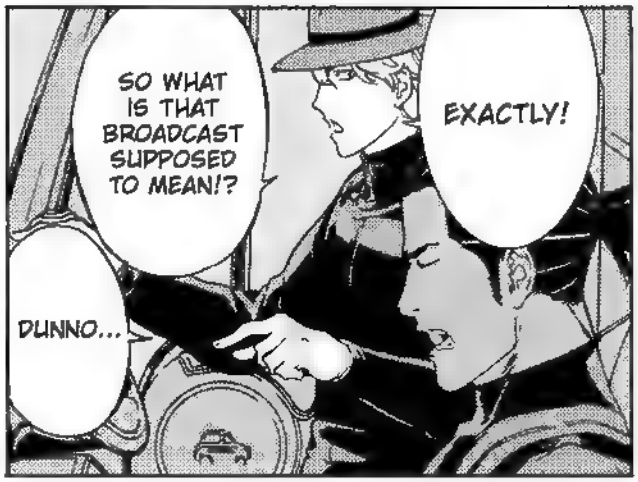


HE REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO SAY THE MESSAGE PROPERLY, SO I HAD TO DO SOME EDITING...
THINK THEY'LL NOTICE?
WELL CONSTRUCTED, THAT RECORDING... AND YOU BROADCAST IT RIGHT IN THE PROPER RADIO WAVELENGTHS.
IT WASN'T TOO HARD.
WE'RE PRODDING THE WEAK POINT OF A DICTATORIAL REGIME.
WEAK POINT?
THIS KIND OF TRICKERY WON'T SUCCEED IN ROUSTING ZASHID, BUT IT'S ALL WE NEED FOR NOW.
THAT'S RIGHT. WE'RE GOING TO STRANGLE THEM WITH SILK.

Until
Death
do us
Part


chapter 177

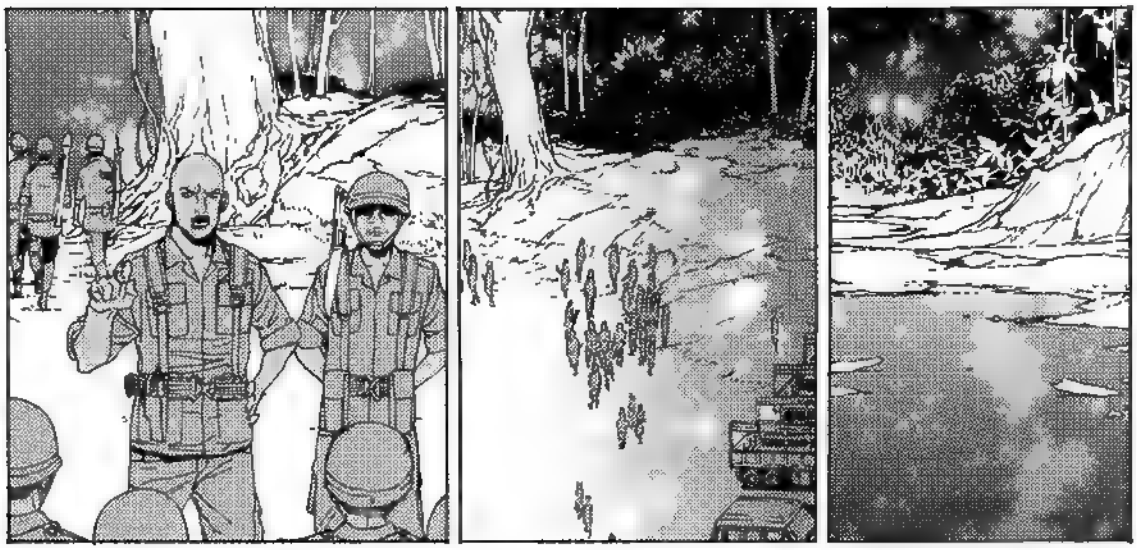
EDGE TURUS, LEADING A REBELLION?

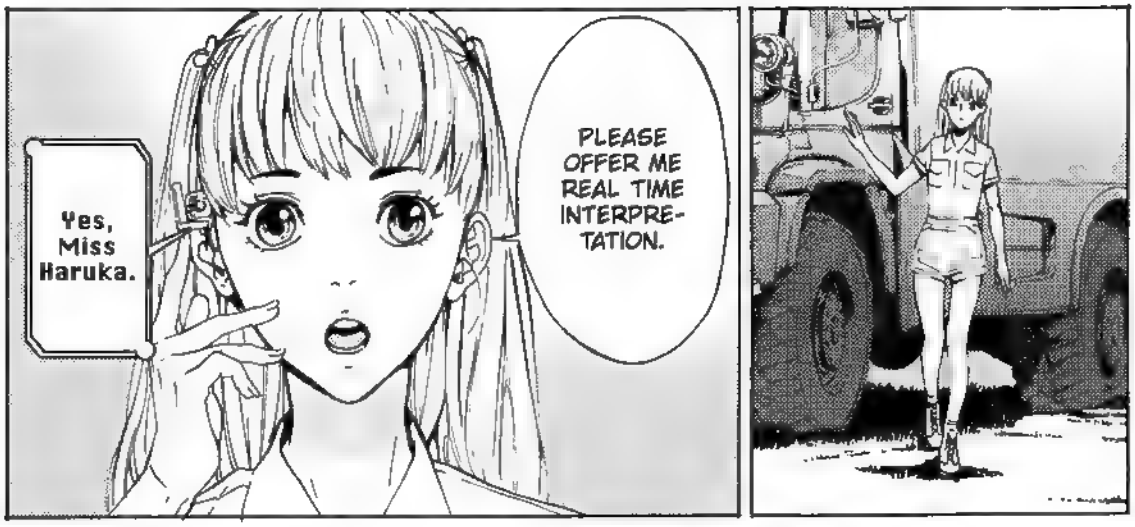

SO WHAT IS THAT BROADCAST SUPPOSED TO MEAN!?
EXACTLY!
DUNNO...

HE'D NEVER DO SUCH A THING, WOULD HE?

MAMORU-SAN...
...I CAN'T IMAGINE THAT CAUSING CONFUSION IS HIS ONLY GOAL.
BUT GIVEN THAT IT'S WISEMAN WHO'S PULLING THE STRINGS FROM THE SHADOWS ...
THERE'S NO WAY ZASHID TURUS WOULD BE SHAKEN BY MUTINY FROM HIM.
WHAT'S UP?
YOU KNOW...
I HATE TO SAY IT, BUT THESE GUYS ARE INCREDIBLY UNDER-FUNDED.

THEY'RE NOT EVEN FIT TO CALL THEMSELVES THE "LIBERATION FRONT."
WEAK WEAPONS, OLD VEHICLES, AND LOW NUMBERS— THOUGH I KNOW THIS ISN'T THEIR FULL FORCE.
AND GUERRILLA WARFARE IS GALBOA'S SPECIALTY.
THAT'S HOW THEY GAINED THEIR INDEPENDENCE. OBVIOUSLY THE OFFICIAL ARMY HAS THE ADVANTAGE.
MOST OF THE OPPOSING NUMBER GETS FORCED OUT OF THE COUNTRY— LIKE ME.
INDEED. OVER EIGHTY PERCENT OF THE COUNTRY'S MIGHT IS ALLIED WITH ZASHID.
...
IT'S VALUABLE TO HAVE ANY SORT OF RESISTANCE WITHIN THE BORDER, IF YOU ASK ME.




Yes, Miss Haruka.
PLEASE OFFER ME REAL TIME INTERPRE-TATION.

YOU'RE SURE YOU WANT TO START THIS?
THE REST WILL BE UP TO YOUR TEAM.
AS ORDERED, WE'LL SURROUND THEM, ATTACK, THEN BACK OFF AT ONCE.

YES. ACCORDING TO OUR DATA, TAUS TURUS IS A CLASSIC, IMPULSIVE WARRIOR.
WE WILL CONFRONT HIM DIRECTLY AND DEFEAT HIM, PROVING OUR SUPERIORITY.

Plus, the enemy is comfortable with guerrilla warfare, and I predict they will not mobilize a large force against so few.
To our advantage, this area is quite swampy ...
...which makes heavy combat vehicles useless.

IN EITHER CASE, THE RESULT WILL DEPEND ON ME, THEN.
Yes Miss Baruka
If Miss Baruka's orders are precise, I will be able to apprehend him.
SPARC speaking
In particular, Jos Iuros is known to be highly intelligent and a candidate for most powerful to battle among the brothers.
This is a terrain map of the area, based on satellite photography

Reports say the advance party's preparations are proceeding smoothly.
From that point of view...
...I would be against even sending you there.
...
I understand your concern.
However, as I am programmed to prioritize human life, I cannot give dangerous orders.
BUT CAN I REALLY BE A LEADER...?
SHOULDN'T YOU BE GIVING THE COMMANDS?

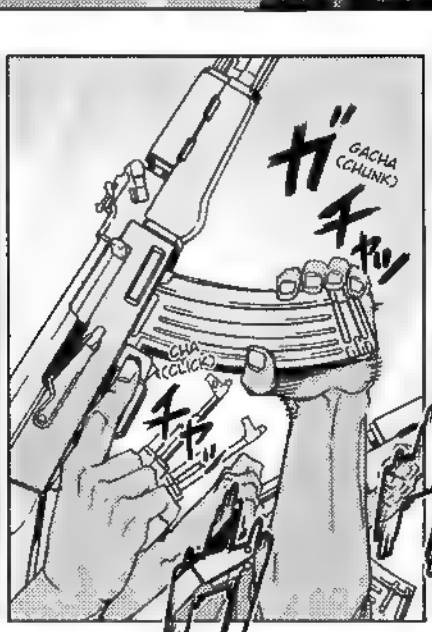
...I UNDERSTAND.
As Shot has the least familiarity with you, he is the most likely to be fair-minded.
We have chosen them for that purpose.
If you simply cannot make the hard decision, lean upon your squad members.
I would remove him from consideration where the locals are concerned.
WHAT?
However!
TA (-TAT)
TA
TA
TA
TA
BLOOO (VRMMM)

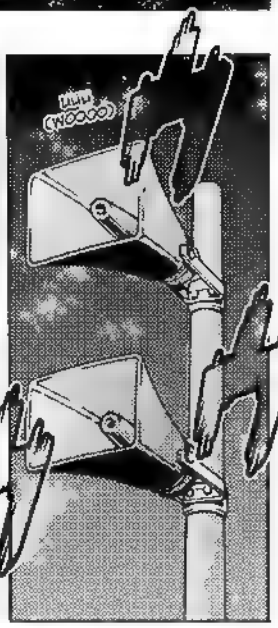
LET'S GO, EVERY-ONE!
ROGER.
ガチャ
GACHA (CLICK)
TRANSFER-RING DRIVE CONTROL TO SPARC.

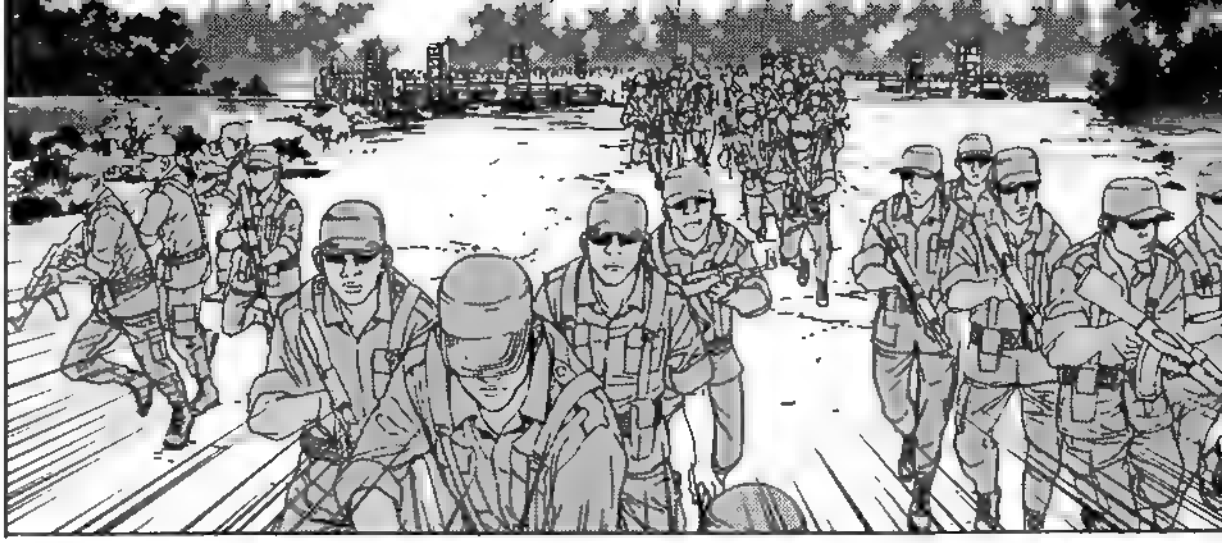
WHAT WE'RE ABOUT TO FACE NOW IS JUST THE FIRST WAVE!
WE MUST DISARM THEM QUICKLY TO GET THE MAIN FORCE ACTIVE.
...SHIT...
WHEN'S MY TURN...?

TA (STAD)
TA
TA
TA
TA
TA
TA
TA
TA

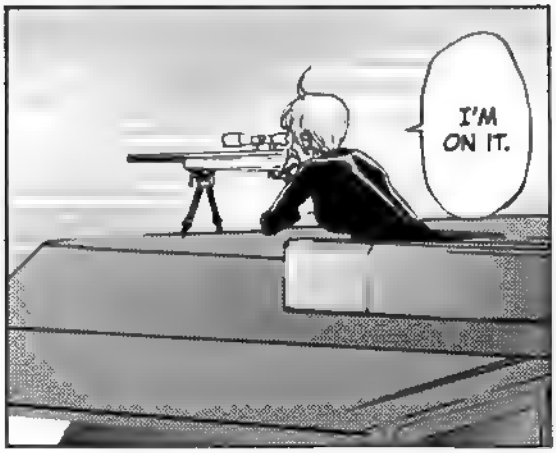
DA (DASH)
ダ
DA
ダ
DA
ダ


GACHA (CHUNK)
ガ
チャッ
CHA (CLICK)
チャッ


UUH (WOOOO)



BA
(WHIRRING)
BA
BA


I'M ON IT.

ASHE-SAN!

Yes, Miss Ashe.
SLOW SPEED. SWITCH SNIPING POINT TO TOOYAMA'S ORDERS.
...BUT THE ORDER'S ON THE DIFFICULT SIDE.
A MOVING SNIPER'S A GOOD TACTIC...
KNOCK A TARGET INTO THE WATER SO THEY CAN'T SWIM, BUT MAKE SURE THEY DON'T DIE?

GUESS I SHOULD THANK HER PLACEMENT.

NICE.
ALMOST
THERE.

KACHI (CLICK)
カチッ
NOW!
!!?
GURA (LURCH)
グラッ
!?
BOSHU (BZOOM)
ボシュッ
ZUBU (FWUNK)
ズブッ
ZUBU
ズブッ

WHAT THE —!?
DOSHAAA (SHWUBB)

IT'S CALLED A "LIQUEFACTION EXPLOSION"!
DON
DON
DON (BOOM)

SMAK!
BYU (ZWIP)
BYU
KA (WHAK)
KIN (TING)
KA

BAKI (CRACK)
BA (WHOOSH)
GA (WHAM)
KAN (TAK)
DOSU (THUD)
KYUN (ZWING)

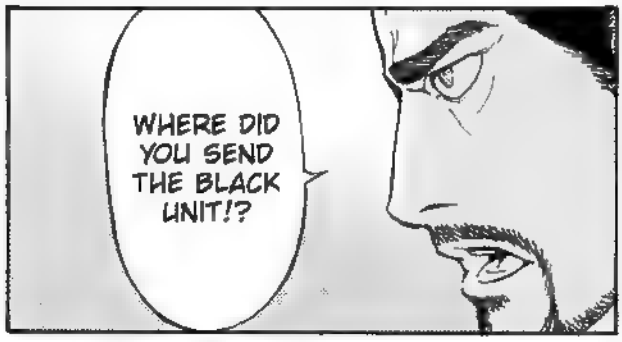
WE'VE NEUTRAL-IZED THE LEAD PARTY, EVERYONE.
Here he comes!
Find safe cover for now.
ZA
ZA (MARCH)

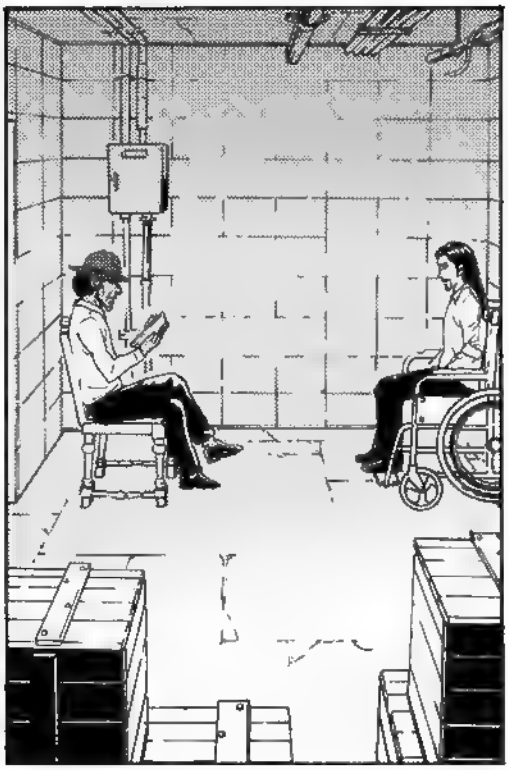
Don't bother shooting him.
HE'S HUGE!

THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN BEAT HIM WITHOUT KILLING HIM...
BUSHUU (FSSH)
system check
ENGINE START
N
0km/h
...is Ibuki-san.

I NEARLY DIED WAITING !!

chapter 178


WHERE DID YOU SEND THE BLACK UNIT!?



...

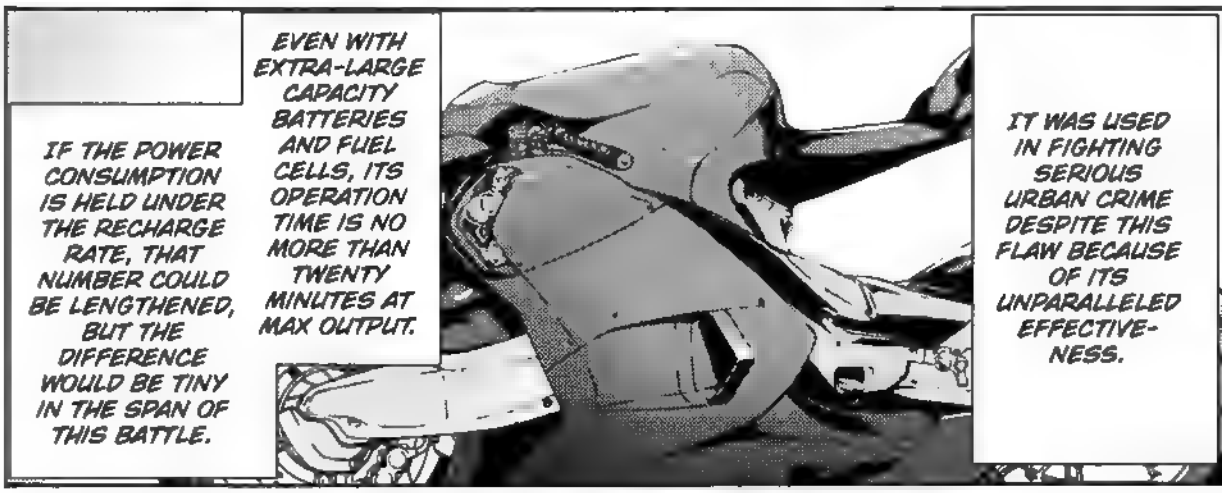
I AM NOT SOFT ENOUGH TO GIVE YOU UNNECESSARY INFORMATION OUT OF SYMPATHY.
WOULD YOU MIND NOT INTERRUPTING MY VALUABLE READING TIME, FORMER DIPLOMAT TURUS?
WHERE ARE THEY CARRYING OUT YOUR PLAN!?
DO YOU REALLY THINK THIS IS GOING TO UNNERVE MY DAD, OF ALL PEOPLE!?
WHAT ARE YOU PLOTTING!? WHAT AM I BEING USED TO DO!?
BUSHU (SHIT)

...
SILENCE!
AAGH!!
THANK GOD.
I CAN FINALLY READ IN PEACE.
TIME'S UP.
ガチャッ
GACHA (CLICK)
BURY HIM IN THE JUNGLE OUT BACK AND NOBODY WILL FIND HIM FOR A WHILE.
FREES UP A PAIR OF EYES FROM GUARD DUTY TOO.
IF HE'S THAT MUCH OF A BOTHER, JUST KILL HIM.

BUT DEPENDING ON THE CIRCUM-STANCES, HE MIGHT STILL HOLD SOME USE...
IF HE MAKES TOO MUCH NOISE, YOU'RE FREE TO CARRY OUT THAT OPTION.
...
...
BUN
BUN (WHOOSH)
BUN
HYU (SWISH)

TA (TAT)
TA
TA
TA
TA
TA
TA
GA (BLAM)
GA
GAN (CLANK)

THE ELECTRIC MOTORCYCLE BUCEPHALUS, THE HIGH-WATER MARK OF VEHICLE TECHNOLOGY, HAS ONE MAJOR WEAKNESS— SHORT OPERATION TIME.
GOT-CHA!
DAI-SAN, THE ENEMY LEADER IS MOVING TO THE PREDICTED LOCATION.

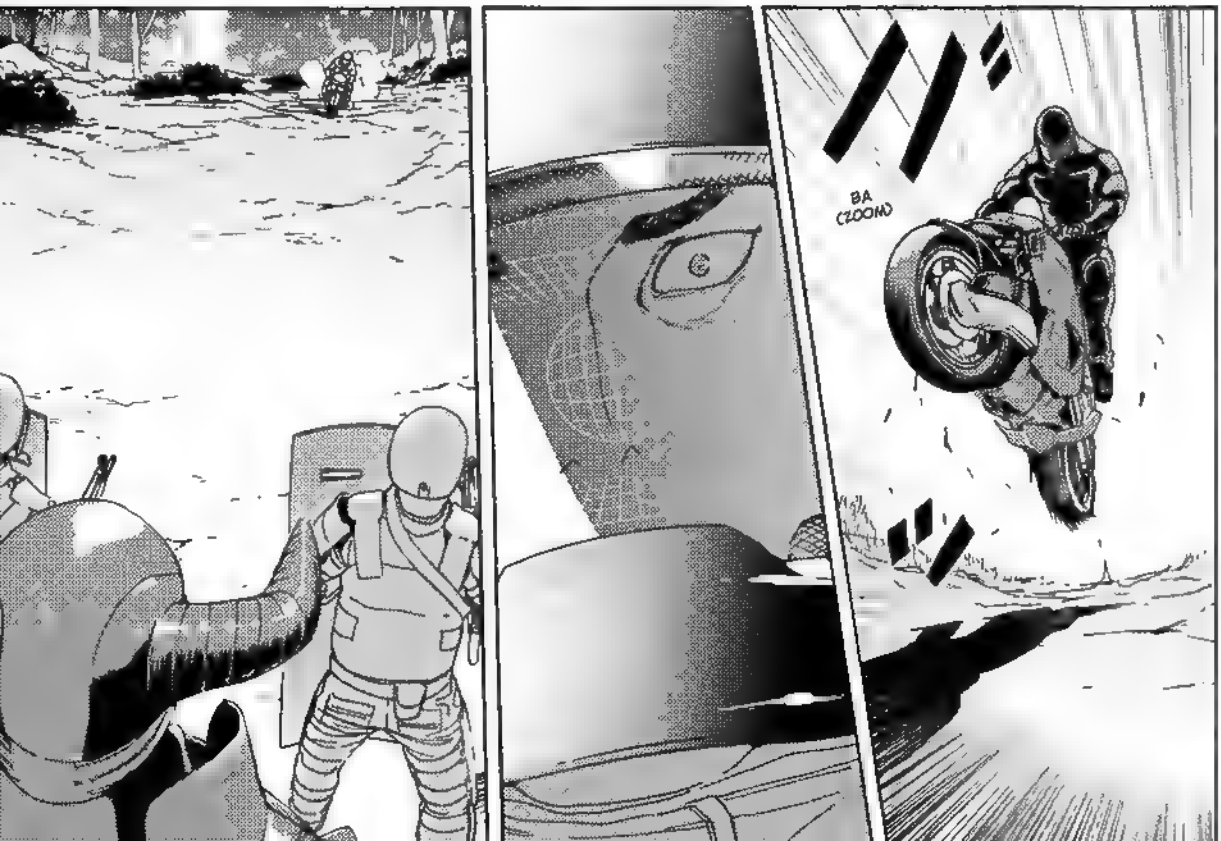

IF THE POWER CONSUMPTION IS HELD UNDER THE RECHARGE RATE, THAT NUMBER COULD BE LENGTHENED, BUT THE DIFFERENCE WOULD BE TINY IN THE SPAN OF THIS BATTLE.
EVEN WITH EXTRA-LARGE CAPACITY BATTERIES AND FUEL CELLS, ITS OPERATION TIME IS NO MORE THAN TWENTY MINUTES AT MAX OUTPUT.
IT WAS USED IN FIGHTING SERIOUS URBAN CRIME DESPITE THIS FLAW BECAUSE OF ITS UNPARALLELED EFFECTIVE-NESS.

GET A LOAD OF THIS, NEW GUYS!!
GOTTA KNOCK OUT TAUS AND HIS DIRECT TROOPS ALL AT ONCE!
THE CRUX OF THIS OPERATION LIES IN HOW WELL THIS TOOL IS UTI-LIZED.

BUT... THE REAL PROBLEM IS THE MAIN FORCE AFTER THEM...
DID THEY REALLY NEUTRALIZE THE ENTIRE ADVANCE UNIT?
TA (TAT)
TA
TA
TA
TA
BA (RRR)
BA
BA
BA
ピー (BEEP)
ピー
ピー
ピー
ピー
ピー
ピー
1
2
3
4
5

SHOOT ALL!
WHRP!

BIRI
BIRI
BIRI
DOGA (WHUD)
URGH!
GAAAH!
AAH!


BA (ZOOM)

SHOOT ALL!

GASHI (KCHK)
DAMN! IS HE IN FULLY-INSU-LATED ARMOR!?
WHAT IS THIS... WATER?!
!?
DO (BLAM)
KIKI (SCREECH)

HYUUN (WOOMZ)

DO

DO

DO

DO

DO

DO (BLAM)

KAN (TANG)

KAKAN

UGH !!

GA (WHAK)

DO

DO

DO

DO

DO

IT MOVES LIKE A FREAK...

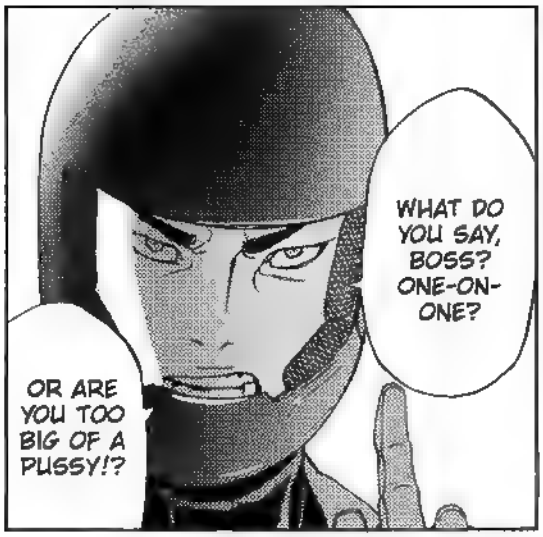
HOW STRONG IS THIS GUY!?

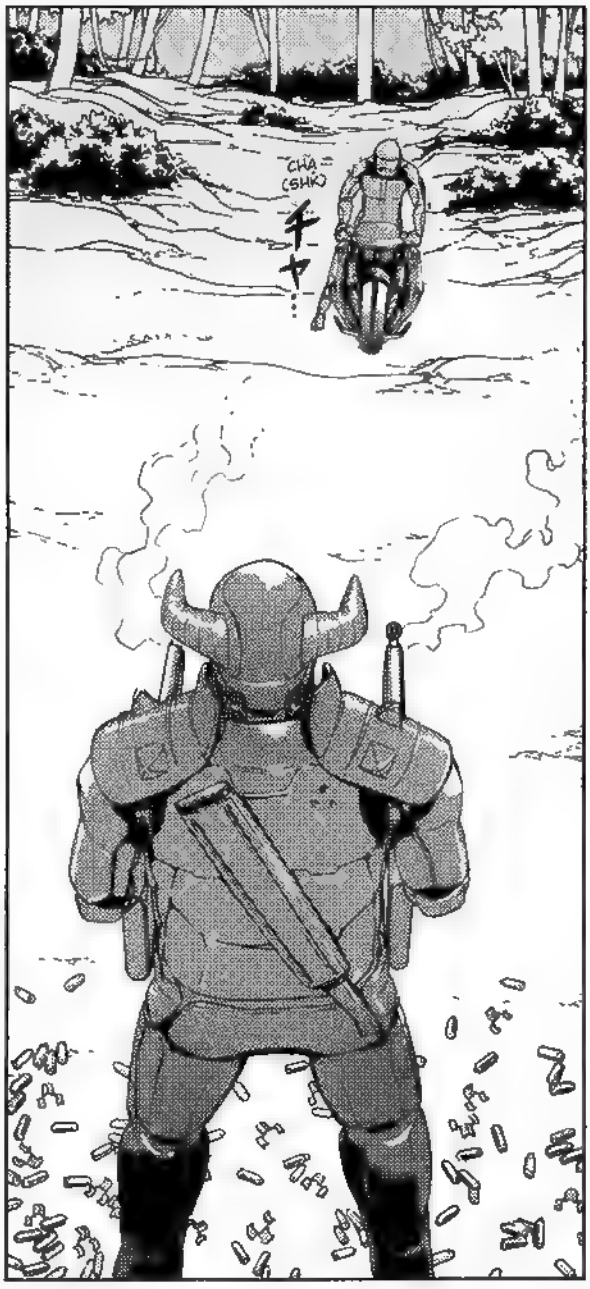
DO
DO
DO
DO
DO
DO (BLAM)
DO
DO
DO
DO
DO
IT MOVES LIKE A FREAK...
HOW STRONG IS THIS GUY!?

HYUUN
(WOOMZ)
KAN
(TANG)
KAKAN
UGH
!!

SPARC-SPEAKING
Overusing the stun shot raises the danger of running out of power.
GYUN (ZOOM)
I GET IT, I GET IT!!
WHAT!?
WHA—!?
GAN (WHAMM)
HYUN (SWISH)

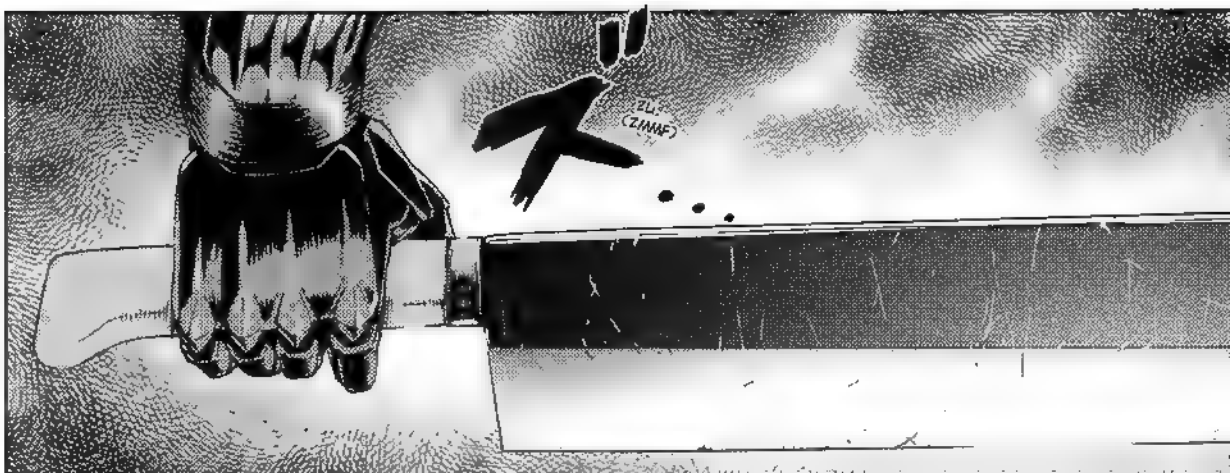
BASH (KICHUNK)
ZUGAGAGA (ZOOOM)
GASH (PUMP)
WELL? DID THAT SAVE ENOUGH POWER FOR YA!?
Yes, Dai.


WHAT DO YOU SAY, BOSS? ONE-ON-ONE?
OR ARE YOU TOO BIG OF A PUSSY!?


CHA (SHK)
チャ

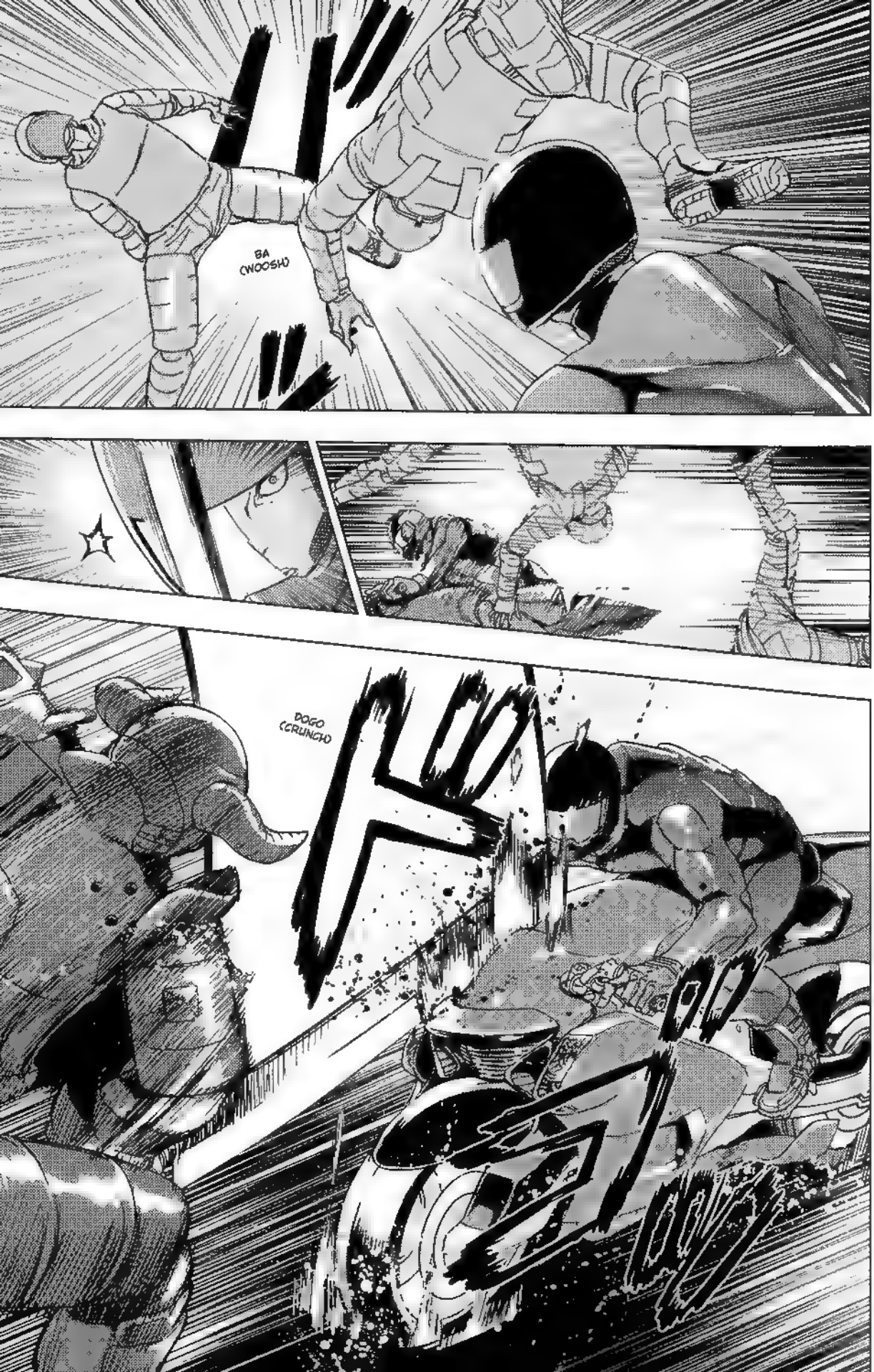
...
SO I SUPPOSE THIS GUN IS WORTH-LESS...

GASHA (CHUNK)
ガシャッ
...AGAINST SIMILAR ARMOR AS MINE...


ZU... (ZMMF)

I WILL DESTROY YOU NOW.
YEAH, HE FEELS EVEN MORE DANGEROUS THAN HE LOOKS...
I SEE...

ROGER.
ELAN-SAN, SHOT-SAN, KEEP THE TROOPS AWAY FROM DAI-SAN!
ROGER.
HIS BATTERY LEVELS ARE BELOW HALF.
BUO (ZOOM)
HYUO (SWOOSH)
...
PERO (LICK)


BA
(WOOSH)
DOGO
(CRUNCH)

BUT NOT EVEN HIGH-CALIBER ROUNDS CAN PIERCE THIS SPECIAL ARMOR!!
IGA CHAAAO

RAAAAAAA
AAAAAA!!
HE TOOK A BODY SHOT FROM 660 POUNDS OF BUCEPHALUS!
ピー
ピー
ピー
ピー
ピー

Warning! Rider, abandon vehicle!

Danger! Abandon vehicle at once!

PI (BEEEP)

DIE!!

Warning! Rider, abandon vehicle!
ピピ
PI
ピピ
PI
BEEPP
Danger! Abandon vehicle at once!
DIE !!

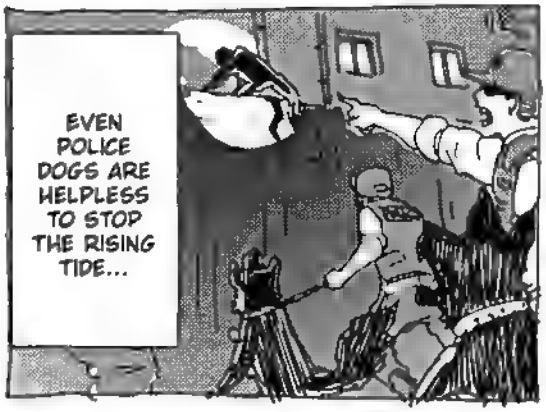
BUN
(WHOOSH)

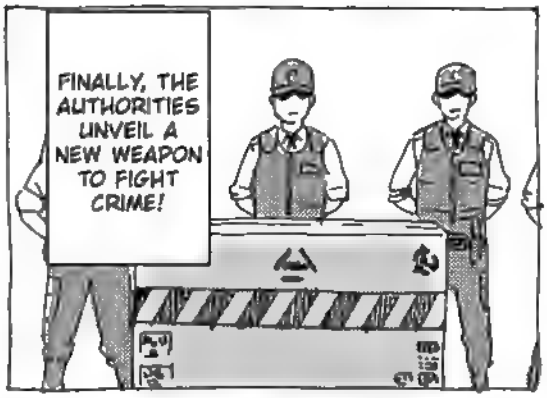
BA
(ZOOM)

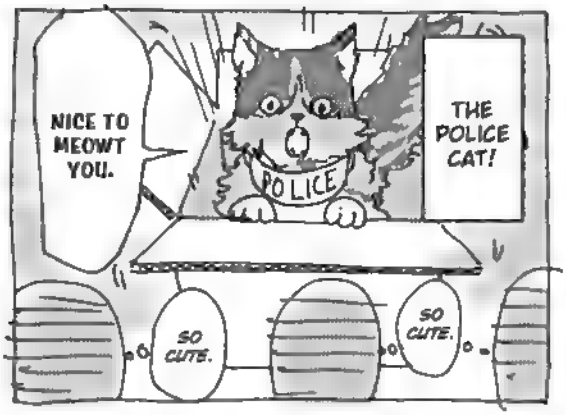
POLICE CAT

CATHERINE

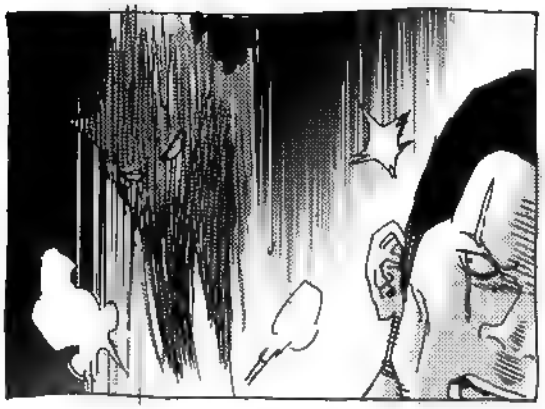
A NEW WEAPON



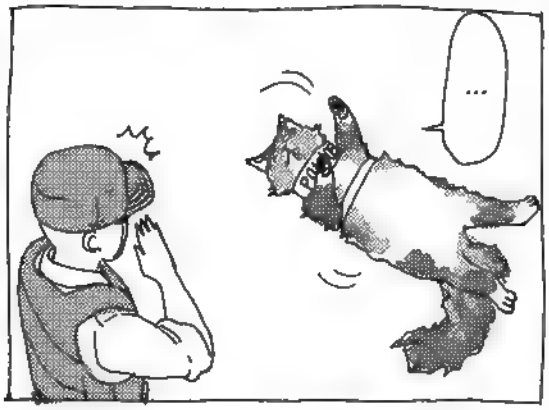


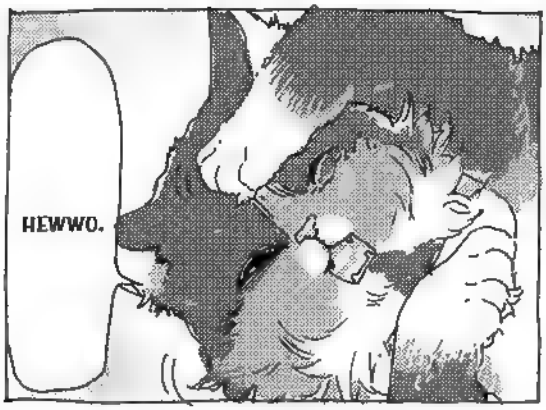


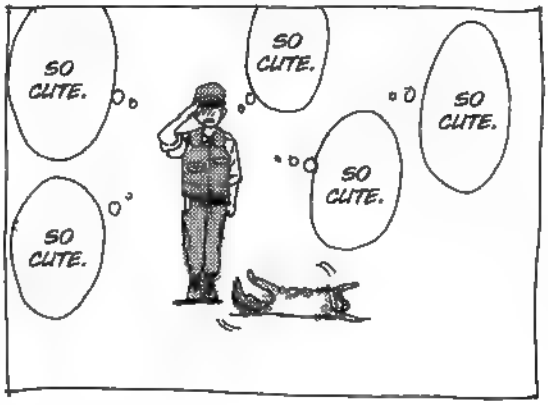
ON THE CHASE



ENCOUNTER







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Until
do us
Death
Part

Translation Notes

Common Honorifics
no honorific: Indicates familiarity or closeness; if used without permission or reason, addressing someone in this manner would constitute an insult.
***-san*:** The Japanese equivalent of Mr./Mrs./Miss. If a situation calls for politeness, this is the fail-safe honorific.
***-sama*:** Conveys great respect; may also indicate that the social status of the speaker is lower than that of the addressee.
***-kun*:** Used most often when referring to boys, this indicates affection or familiarity. Occasionally used by older men among their peers, but it may also be used by anyone referring to a person of lower standing.
***-chan*:** An affectionate honorific indicating familiarity used mostly in reference to girls; also used in reference to cute persons or animals of either gender.
***-senpai*:** A suffix used to address upperclassmen or more experienced coworkers.
***-sensei*:** A respectful term for teachers, artists, or high-level professionals.

Yen conversion: While exchange rates fluctuate daily, a convenient conversion estimation is about ¥100 to 1 USD.

Page 21
Tarou Urashima: A fairy tale figure who saved a turtle from some cruel children, and was taken to the underwater Dragon Palace in thanks. As he left, Urashima was given a special treasure chest called a Tamatebako, but instructed never to open it. Despite being gone only three days, he finds that he has actually been away for 300 years, and everyone he knew is now dead. When he opens the tamatebako, inside is his old age, and he is instantly aged and decrepit. In figurative terms, this name can therefore be applied to anyone who disappears and only comes back many, many years later—a Western analogue would be Rip Van Winkle.

Page 109
Naginata: A polearm that consisted of a curved katana blade on the end of a long wooden pole. The closest European equivalent would be a glaive.

Page 110
Shinai: The softer, bamboo-made sword used in modern kendo. The "blade" is made of multiple flexible bamboo slats that give somewhat when a target is struck, making them much safer to use.

Page 135
Danzai: The Japanese word for "conviction" or "condemnation."

Page 199
Donichi: This character's name, Eiichi, is written with the kanji for "sharp" and "one." He had previously made a joke about being "*donichi*," or "dull one."

Page 228
Calpis: A non-carbonated beverage that contains lactic acid, giving it a bit of a yogurt-y taste. There are a number of fruit flavors of Calpis.

PAGE 235

Hagakure: A book written by Yamamoto Tsunetomo in the early 18th century, often subtitled *The Way of the Samurai* in translation, detailing Yamamoto's views on the samurai code known as "bushido." It was written after the Tokugawa shogunate had unified Japan and the fierce fighting of the Sengoku (Warring States) Era had passed, and was therefore intended to be a manual to a mindset and way of life that was, in the author's view, in danger of being lost. The title *Hagakure* means "hidden in the leaves."

UNTIL DEATH DO US PART 11

Hiroshi Takashige
DOUBLE-S

Translation: Stephen Paul
Lettering: AndWorld Design

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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